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and Country Magazine

SEVENTY-SECOND YEAR FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 10th, 1954 1s. 3d. WEEKLY

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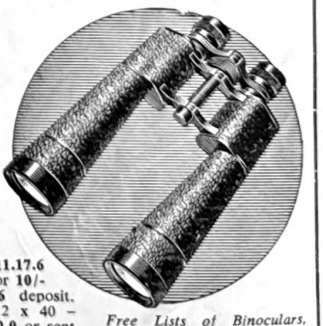

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NOTES AND COMMENTS

IF grouse shooting over the best-stocked moors is let on long lease to certain wealthy families — many of whom are, by the way, American—it is nevertheless not correct to say that this sport cannot be enjoyed by the less-fortunately placed shooting man. Brief reference has already been made to this matter, but a letter which appeared recently in a leading daily newspaper goes some way to confirm our contention that tolerable sport may be had by a *wide* range of shooters. Naturally such sporting forays cost money — holidays of any kind cannot be had cheaply to-day. But it is surely as well to know that the man of average means *can* shoot grouse much as he can shoot partridges.

What is suggested is that some of the agents who make it their business to find shooting and fishing for those who in summer are clear in their intentions of going North should also give some consideration to the needs of such who wish to participate in some *modest* sport. While this would no doubt entail a more detailed kind of work and only small commission, it would, in fact, be a service that was well worth the time and trouble. It is all very well for those "in the conversation" who are acquainted with hotel proprietors and others who can cater for shooting guests, but it has to be realised that there exists a large section and probably a potentially larger section of people who have no contacts of the kind whatsoever. The latter have no idea of where to go or what to do. Frequently they write to this journal.

Recent reports of grouse shooting indicate that the hotel habit is growing, and, it would seem, growing healthily. Besides, there are smaller places providing reasonable accommodation and shooting over which, by means of active walking and hard work, some grouse may be shot. But for the man who does not know, the trouble is to find these places.

It is true enough that the cost and conditions of shooting grouse at all these days bear no comparison with, say, those of thirty or forty years ago. And before the first war matters were still farther in favour of the seeker after sport. But it is no good shedding tears over what has been. The great point is that the grouse are there and call for as good shooting as ever to bring them to account.

What it seems is wanted is something in the nature of a register of hotels and other places where visitors who wish to do a little grouse shooting may go. The ordinary tourist is well looked after in this respect, but the shooting man often has to fend for himself.

Really good grouse ground can always be let on the international market. But in Scotland more especially lie opportunities for keen shots who will be content with some modest sport which is not beyond their pockets. What is needed is to bring the two together — or rather to increase the ways and means of achieving this end. There is no reason why grouse shooting should not be made as democratic as partridge shooting. And for that matter deer stalking, too. The latter would give a fillip to rifle shooting and to the rifle trade.

* * *

MYXOMATOSIS SIDELIGHTS

In his Diocesan Letter, the Archbishop of York says that he has been asked to state the Christian attitude to myxomatosis. "I can only give my own opinion," he states, "though I am sure it is shared by many. Rabbits are a plague to the farmer and gardener. Every year they devour large quantities of grain and vegetables intended for human food. They should, therefore, be reduced in number as painlessly and quickly as possible. It is un-Christian and inhuman to infect them deliberately with a disease which causes them to die in agony. In places where rabbits are dying in this way organised steps should be taken to put them out of misery and to kill painlessly other rabbits in the infected area. The wholesale extermination of rabbits by this disease may have unexpected and undesirable results both on other animals and possibly on man himself." Incidentally, the Queen, who recently received a report at Balmoral on the spreading of the disease at Windsor, has instructed her keepers in Windsor Great Park and Forest to kill off rabbits lingering with myxomatosis. Many thousands of rabbits have died from the disease and one of the keepers is reported to have said that while they were shooting large numbers to put them out of their distress, many in the early stages of the disease have so far eluded them.

TAME RABBITS AFFECTED

Myxomatosis has now become a menace to domestic breeds of rabbit. Mr. John Sandford, secretary of the British Rabbit Council, said: "Cases have occurred among exhibition and fur rabbits at Edenbridge, Deal and Whitstable, in Kent, at Lewes, in Sussex, and in Essex. One breeder in the Lewes area lost 16 rabbits and a gamekeeper in Essex had to destroy 14." Britain's 750,000 domestic rabbit keepers, who are estimated to own 25,000,000 animals, have been advised to take precautions against plague-spreading insects. The precautions include covering hutches with mosquito nets, spraying with insect killer, and injecting vaccine, now available. Said Mr. Sandford: "If the disease continues to spread, some breeders will lose a lot of money."

LAST DAYS

Trout fishermen will do their utmost to spend as much time as possible on the water as the end of the season comes in sight. So far the season has been a mixed one, with the balance a little on the side of "good." Heavy rainfall has frequently caused impossibly full conditions, but there have been long periods when the rivers have fined down sufficiently for fishing; and there has been none of the low August water that so often makes success impossible except to a few gifted anglers whose knowledge and skill amount to genius. The fisherman who travels extensively in England and Wales must watch the calendar and local regulations, for though the statutory end of the season is September 30, several River Boards and other authorities cut down the season by anything from a fortnight to a single day. It is difficult to understand why this should be so, for local conditions cannot jutify the alterations if considered purely in the light of the effect on the spawning of trout. In the several areas where the open season ends on September 29 inclusive instead of September 30 inclusive one is left with the impression that when the by-laws were drafted there was confusion between exclusive and inclusive, and that, though the original intention was to conform to statutory dates, a mistake was made which no one has had the strength of mind to correct.

A JOB WORTH DOING

It is always pleasant to hear that the disinterested efforts of enthusiasts are showing results. The Lower Avon Navigation Trust Ltd., which was formed in 1950 to assist in the preservation of the Lower Avon from Stratford to Tewkesbury, reports that they have restored four of the seven locks on the stretch of the river in which they are concerned. The Trust started with an appeal for £20,000, of which about £17,500 has been contributed. This sum was necessary for the purchase of materials (a pair of lock gates cost £500), and the hire of skilled labour. However, the largest part of the necessary work is carried out as a break from their normal occupation by groups of volunteers who believe that the maintenance of the river, wending its way through some of the most lovely country in Britain, is a hobby worth following. The preservation of the more beautiful parts of our countryside is one which must be very close to the hearts of all of us.

RED DEER OF ARGENTINE

It is reported that the Argentine display at the International Exhibition of Big Game Hunting and Fishing, to be held at Düsseldorf from October 16-31, will include a number of antlers of red deer which were brought from Europe to the Argentine jungle 20 years ago and since then have largely multiplied. This type of game has developed so favourably that it is now superior to European deer.

COVER PICTURE

Our cover picture this week is the reproduction of a painting by Hugh Monahan, a number of whose pictures can be seen at Messrs. Rowland Ward's galleries in Piccadilly.

Ramblings

by Tower-Bird

THE only good things I can say about the weather during the past week or two are that it has provided one or two early mornings when white mist has hidden the marshes and a real late September freshness was in the air; there have been odd days of sunshine; there have been late evenings of colour and calm borrowed from autumn, though the immediate behaviour and movements of birds, from the mighty white swans to the warblers churring among rush and reed, made plain that summer was still with us. Otherwise, the weather has been foul; green and corn crops have suffered, and I have never known a worse season for gardeners. Why this latter should be I cannot say, but, to give but one example, early carrots failed almost completely in the south-midlands and the south, and even the second sowing appears to have been much retarded.

The main mystery, so far as I am concerned, is that, despite a very wet summer and extensive periods of really heavy rain, some of my favourite flight-ponds remain dry, and even most of the smaller dykes, or drains are at as low a water-level as I have known them. The result is that, where there should be duck there are no duck, only the odd one.

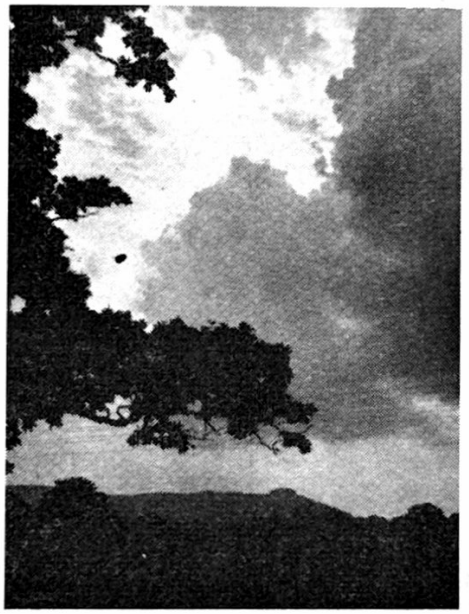
A farmer in a car pulled up when he saw me in the village street and asked me if I could get him a duck as soon as possible. I told him that I would do so, providing he could tell me where to find one "handy home." This he was able to do, for he had flushed a couple that morning from a bit of a drain on his extensive land over which he had given me permission to shoot last season, but where I, in fact, did not set foot, being too busy elsewhere. So this afternoon, after walking round some low ground of my own, I continued on to his place, discovered the drain set in two acres of real bogland, and after sinking several times nearly up to the top of my wellingtons, was annoyed to see two mallard rise some sixty yards ahead of me. But next moment another mallard came up out of a deep creek less than thirty yards away, and so I was able to take the farmer his duck.

Later in the evening I went out on to the marshes towards dusk to get a feed for myself, but saw only a few small parties of mallard at a distance and those flying high towards distant barley fields. As dusk deepened, a partridge gave two rasping calls on the far side of the marsh-bank, and, in a fit of curiosity, I walked out into the grass, flushing a well-grown, strong covey of fourteen birds including the old pair. As it grew darker the usual flock of green plover came flying and diving and scattering over the ground and I could hear their wailing as what is left of a waning moon arrived suddenly in the sky from behind a mist of clouds an hour or so later.

Mud Gutters Again

Yesterday, a black, frowning curtain had covered the whole of the western sky as I made at dawn for the coast, but very soon this threat to my hopes had given way to bright, warm sunshine. Two of us sat in deep mud-creeks, well content to remain so for several hours, but expecting to get very little shooting. In fact, during the morning, we saw not a single duck—unless you count a fairly large party of shelduck which were flying restlessly to and fro; obviously a number of young being put through their paces by more elderly and tougher relatives.

On extensive marshes the distant report of a gun sounds like the pop of a champagne-cork, and even when two of you are sitting perhaps no more than three-hundred yards apart in the cover of deep gullies, the sound of each other's shots is profoundly smothered. After about twenty minutes, I saw a couple of whimbrel passing near my companion's creek, heard the dull "poof" of a shot and watched one of the birds plane down. I guessed it was only winged, and I watched the human figure crawl out on to the spartina grass to search for it. There were deep creeks between us, and I knew full well that Don would not work for anyone but his master, but I told the dog to go, and he tore over to my companion, made a fuss of him, pretended he did not know what orders were being given to him, and then tore back to me—arriving plastered in mud. The search for the bird being unsuccessful, I sploshed along my creek into a



In the foreground a hedge; in the background the down-tops to which hundreds of duck flight at dusk to the barley stubbles.

main channel, waded down this, and for some time we looked for the whimbrel, but I fancy it had long departed across the saltings via the mud gutters, and we found neither scent nor tracks of it.

Rustic Humour

Eventually, we returned to the little village nearby, with only a curlew and some shanks in the bag, and settled down in an inn for a bite and a drink. Soon after, things became normal, by which statement I infer that the heavens opened and the rain descended in buckets and the whole sky became overcast. For a couple of hours or so the landscape was blotted out; then it cleared a little and we took car over to the arm of a great harbour, but there were so many yachts and sailing boats here that it would have been waste of time to wait for flight, though in winter it is a far different story. So we took ourselves off elsewhere, adding a few more birds to the bag and getting wet in the process.

In the evening, I called at a river-side inn far from the coast for well-deserved refreshment, and immediately ran into a barrage of rustic humour. "You've come to the right place now," said a native; "the landlord believes in selling beer black-pudding fashion." This was a new one on me, and I asked for an explanation. "Why," came the reply, "he sells it by the skinful." The landlord himself was not without a sense of the ridiculous, for I watched him "telling the tale" to two receptive strangers. Finally he pointed out an ancient clock over the mantleshelf and assured them that it had belonged to his great-grandfather. "And you know," he said, "though you may not believe it, that clock is so old that the shadow of the swinging pendulum has worn quite a groove in the woodwork at the back." He opened the little trap door to show his customers, and they peered seriously into the dark interior.

Mine Ease at the Inn

There are, I know, a number of my readers who prefer to take their nourishment respectably at home, or at the home of their friends, but I must confess that I have, in the course of over thirty years, found the best of most interesting companionship and comfort in little inns, and I can only wish myself another thirty years of similar exploration and pleasantness. Alas, the small, unspoiled inn is rapidly becoming a thing of the past. Breweries and landlords suffering "from the times," with the resultant financial cramp, seek to appeal to motorists and "foreigners." I have visited quiet little places which I knew years before to find them no longer homely spots with hard-scrubbed deal tables and uneven brick floors, but road-houses with chromium-plated accessories, almost futuristic furnituring, imitation tiled floors, and an atmosphere which is quite foreign to simplicity and contentment.

And how, too (to us old 'uns) does the rising generation change. The last good hiding I received, which was many years ago, left the marks of ten swipes with a swagger-cane across the fleshy part of my anatomy. I was caught raiding an apple-tree. The back door of the owner's cottage opened and a man emerged (a regular soldier home on leave). With the idea of giving myself covering fire, I started to pelt him with stones (an old Essex custom), with the result that one or two tiles on the low-sloping roof were broken and came clattering down round the door and upon his person.

Last week, half-a-dozen boys, between the ages of ten and seventeen, were brought before the owner of a plum-tree which they had raided. Some were accompanied by their parents. I watched the interview with interest, but felt quite sick at the way none owned up, but each sneaked on one or more of his companions. I spoke to one of the parents later, and he said: "You can't expect nippers to own up; anyway, I offered to pay for the plums." My own thoughts were that you can't blame the nippers if their parents coddle them. In my young days, I should have been clipped on the ear, or elsewhere, for pinching the plums, and clipped even harder for sneaking on my friends.

But recently a friend of mine who lives in splendid isolation caught five small boys stealing his apples. He locked them in a loft of a grannery and told them that he was off to fetch a policeman. In fact, he had his lunch at leisure, took a stroll round with his dog and gun, and then returned and released his prisoners. "The policeman will be here in ten minutes," he announced. "I am going to give you the chance to make yourselves scarce." Those boys took off like nobody's business, and I do not think that my friend will be bothered with them again.

The old stag at bay—the author takes a look round the marsh.

An Historic Marsh—VI

by J. Wentworth Day

HALF the fun of the marsh and, indeed, of any shoot anywhere, lay in discovering the old names for different fields and marshes, or dykes and fleets and ferreting out, where possible, their origins. Why, for example, should one of the big fleets be called Joyce's Head? Who was Joyce and what on earth had his head to do with that deep and sullen sheet of eel-infested water? I have not yet found the answer. And what an enchanting name is Pennyhole. But why and wherefore it should be called is still a mystery.

There was the Cow Marsh, which explains itself, and the Counter Bank, a great rabbit-riddled earthern rampart which ran from one sea-wall to the other, cutting off the lower half of the marsh from the top half. The origin of that was plain enough—to act as a countering wall to any sudden inrush of the sea which might burst the sea-wall at the lower end and flood the lower half. But, like most counter banks on most marshes, it had been let go and was no more fit to withstand a sudden flood than a rampart of sponges.

Indeed, on one great cultivated marsh only a few miles away, when the sea overwhelmed all that coast two winters ago, hundreds of acres were flooded merely because short-sighted farmers had cut trackways through the counter-banks to enable their tractors and carts to pass through them, instead of over them. When the black night of floods came, the spumy sea poured, a cauldron of seething waters, through the breaches which short-sighted and lazy men had made.

Then there was Quinces Corner, a great bend in the sea-wall on a broad and lonely creek leading to a thatched church where the smugglers used to hide their barrels under the pulpit. They say that Quince was a smuggler. And Tiffin's Creek, which was no creek at all, but a fleet, reed-grown and deep, out in the lonely marsh, a rare place for nesting pochard.

Marshman and Smuggler

Tiffin was a marshman and a smuggler too, kinsman of that other salty, unlettered character, old Tiffin, who, until a few years back, dwelt a few miles down the houseless coast in a little brick and half-timbered cottage under the sea-wall at the Grange Outfall, where the mudflats go shelving out for near two miles into the yeasty sea and the black geese *cronk* in thousands and the wigeon come in on whistling wings under the stars like a mighty rushing sound of waters.

Old Tiffin lived there in the Old Coastguard Cottage, a lonely, belligerent, hermit life, the friend of no strangers, the enemy of all wild-fowl, the cunning catcher of fish and eels, a man who called no man his master, save only my stout yeoman friend, Leslie Attenborough, that mighty farmer who, at one time, held 5,000 acres of the broad marshland under corn and cattle.

Collector of Bodies

Old Tiffin was a great collector of bodies, a connoisseur of the dead, a prowler of the tide-line, a corpse-catcher. The lonely flats that stretched for miles to the sea-wall above which his cottage chimney just peeped, were a ghoulish treasure ground. For you might be sure that if a man was drowned between Dover and the North Foreland, or lost in the mouth of the Thames, where seaways and swatchways are a graveyard for fog-bound ships and amateur sailors, the tides would, ten to one, carry the bobbing, sodden corpse up the coast until, by some queer confluence of currents, it was cast up at the feet of the curlew, to the sudden affright of the black geese, on that lone and bitter stretch of mud-flat and salting which they call the Black Grounds.

It was there one night that two old fisherman-fowler friends of mine, having dropped the hook of their smack in the Big Rill, a great channel that in those days cut straight in across the flats like a ruler and is now, alas, silted-up, made the most macabre discovery of their rough, seafaring lives. Let one tell it in his own words.

"We laid in the Big Rill that night, Marster, an' that frawned (froze) fit to flee yer. We ha'nt no coal aboard, so I slipped on me splatchers (mud-shoes) and slips across the flats to owd Tiffin's place. That was dead low-water and pitch-black, black as a nigger at the bottom of a well, but I knowd me way.

"I knocked on the door, and owd Tiffin sings out; 'Who's that? Keep out, or I'll shoot ye!' He would a' rone tew! A rum old cove—hard as nails. I sings out me name an' ast him if he could let us hev a mite o' coal fer the smack.

"'Help yourself' he said, niver openin' the door. 'Goo you in the coal-shed an' fill yar little owd bag. Leave a bob on the door!' So in the coal shed I goes, crópin' about in the dark, an', thinks I, there's a rum funny owd stink in here. Lord! That did hum! I was feelin' for the coal when I stubs me foot on suffin' soft.

"I struck a match, an', Lor'! There lay a dead man! Bin in the water a month, I reckon. Had a suit o' evenin' clothes on an' a rare nice pair o' dancin' shoes on. I dropped my match quick!

"Still, I had to git me coal, so I struck another, stepped over the dead 'un, filled me little owd bag quick an' hopped out o' there right smart. I left owd Tiffin a bob on the doorstep and he hollered out; 'Goo night!' He niver said nuffin about the dead 'un, ne more did I.

A Profitable Enterprise

"I nipped back to me smack, makes up me little owd fire in the stove, shoots on a shovel full o' coal and sets a match to it. That blazed up right well. Presently, my owd mate starts a-sniffin' an' then he sez; 'There's a rare funny hum in here. Smells just like a dead 'un!'

"That was the smell of that dead man hangin' round the coal! So I towd me owd mate what I'd sin. We buth on us kept our clappers tight, but I heered arterwards as how owd Tiffin made a sight o' money out a' that dead 'un.

"He went through his pockets, got all his papers, tuk 'em up tew the village, tree moile away, where he had a pal what could read an' write an' they found out that this was a French gennleman. He'd been lorst off a cross-Channel boat.

"So they writ off to his people. They sent a man for the body an' give owd Tiffin a pocket full o' money. Seems like they'd made a fortune out o' water—ah! water! not the owd stuff out o' the pump but this here bottled water, what the toffs drink arter they've hed a skinful!"

Oddly enough, the son of that hard-bitten old resurrectionist of the tide-line, was the man who discovered the headless body of the murdered Setty when it was cast up on the same lonely coast a few years ago.

We found no bodies on our marsh, nor wanted any. But, on a mudbank out in the channel after an exceptionally strong tide and a battling wind, a skeleton showed up in the mud. Smack after smack sailed past it, saw it, but not a word was spoken to the Police. The winklers peered at it. The long-shore gunners stepped gingerly over it. Finally, word seeped out to the village constable. Away he went to the coast, helmet jammed over his ears, notebook at the ready, and the dawn of intelligent research lighting his bland and ham-like countenance. He investigated.

"An', do you believe it, Sir" he said to me afterwards. "That body had been there for years. Seemed like it was a Scandinavian sailor. Seemed as though them chaps had known of it for years, but as one of 'em said to me when I questioned him:

"'Why should I disturb the poor owd feller? He lay there quiet enough! He don't hut me an' I don't hut him!'

"But that corpse hurt me alright, when I got it out of the mud," the Robert continued.

"How did it hurt you?" I asked.

"It bit me! Believe me or not, it bit me. I stuck me finger in the mouth of the skull to lift it out of the mud an' it laid on to me and it drawed blood! I dropped that right smart!

"D'you know, Sir, there was an old crab inside that skull and he laid onto my finger like a bulldog."

There were no skulls to haunt our marsh, but there came a mighty strange visitation on a night of war. We had just finished the evening flight on Joyce's Head and had picked up, perhaps, a score of duck between five or six of us—Sir Jocelyn Lucas, Colonel Robert Adeane, Lord Lisle, Mr. Edward Marsh and myself—when there came out of the dark sky, over the dark sea, under the stars, a mighty, rushing torrent of wings, a gabbling and honking as of all the hounds of hell, a witch-like, eerie chorus of whistles and yelps, as though the whole sky was alive with the spirits of the Brocken hunted by the Valkyries themselves. Never in my life have I heard such a demented chorus of bird cries and whistles, such a Niagara of wings.

As we staggered up the rutted track across the glimmering marsh to the cars a mile away at the foot of the lane, the torrent of wings kept passing over in successive waves of ghostly and demented sounds. The night was tortured with it.

The author's daughter, Clare, and one of the hides built beside Joyce's Head fleet.

And when we reached the inn, the little barge-boarded Queen's Head, standing in the village square by the pot-bellied, sagging, ancient post office with its crooked roof and twisted chimney, the hunted hounds of the sky were still pouring over, high under the stars. All the men of the village were out, standing on the gravel, tankards in hand, wondering in the dark the why and wherefore of that incredible passage of birds.

Wildfowl Out of Holland

I knew in the morning. A friend at the War Office rang me up under a cut-throat pledge of secrecy and said: "You know where those birds came from last night? They were all the wildfowl out of Holland. Our bombers blew up the great dykes with block-busters on one of the Dutch islands last night—and every bird on the Scheldt took to its wings and fled to England. God knows where they ended up—probably on the Severn or away out on the Shannon."

And that, my marsters, as they say down on the marsh, "is a trew piece sartin sure as I sit here," the avian reaction to the great blasting of Walcheren.

Looking at the meagre and exiguous records which one kept in what passed for a game-book in those harassed times when a day on the marsh was a day stolen from the imminence of death elsewhere, I see that on August 19, Sir Jocelyn Lucas, Allen Clark of Braxted Park, Robert Adeane, Jack Budd, my wife, and myself killed sixteen duck, two snipe, three coot, nine rabbits, two partridges and eight doves. A total of forty-three head, following up, on September 15, with seventeen brace of partridges, two rabbits, two pigeon and two foxes off the uplands. With us then, was Squadron-Leader John Hortin, son of the old owner of the estate, Mr. Hurlstone Hortin, who had done so much to bring the whole place back to life.

A Mixed Bag

The following day, shooting the marsh, we got a mixed bag of twenty-eight head, including wigeon, teal, mallard, a curlew, a partridge and a dozen rabbits. The weather was cloudy to fine with a strong south-west wind and there were at least fifteen hundred wigeon wheeling and swinging backwards and forwards over the fleets, but they were as wild as hawks owing to bombing and dogfights and we hardly got within gunshot of one of them.

My wife distinguished herself that day by killing one of the highest teal I have ever seen, as it came rocketing out of the decoy pond, a beautiful, high, overhead shot which two other guns had already missed, when suddenly, out of a reed-bed, there came the whip-like crack of a 20-bore and the teal, which by then had almost reached the proportions of a distant mosquito, folded up its wings and plunged earthwards to fall with a "sock" into the oozy edge of the pond, whence it was retrieved with conscious pride by Mr. Sponge.

"Blow me tight, if I don't believe that was Madam" said Fell with feeling. "I don't like ladies out with a gun but, Lord! She deserves the freedom of this owd place."

Things brightened up towards the end of September. On the 29th, a fine, blue day with a brisk wind, there were a good five hundred wigeon swinging backwards and forwards across the marsh, about eighty teal that went out of the decoy pond with a great rush of wings, a score or so of mallard and a few shoveler gunting from pool to pool, looking like wine bottles on wings. John Hortin and his brother-in-law, Captain J. C. Eaton, R.N., were out with us, Lord Lisle, Major Philip Martin, Jack Budd, one of the Marsh brothers and Leslie O'Connor and, between us, we bagged thirty-one wigeon, a dozen teal, two mallard, thirteen brace of partridges, a couple of rabbits, a fox, a swan, and a moorhen. Altogether, with the oddments, a total of seventy-six head—nothing to what it would have been in the piping days of peace, but nonetheless a very pretty day.

(To be continued next week)

Death of Stanley Duncan

WE announce with regret the death of Mr. Stanley Duncan, the founder, and for many years the honorary secretary, of The Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland and for 60 years a contributor to this journal. Stanley (as so many of us knew him) passed away on August 30; his wife, who had been his partner for over 50 years, died three months earlier. Their golden wedding was celebrated on July 13, 1953, one week before his 75th birthday.

Stanley had been failing in health since the war ended, but the loss of his wife was a great shock, and too much for him. He leaves three sons, none of whom follows their famous father in the shooting field.

The idea of founding The Wildfowlers' Association was born at Patrington, a favourite wildfowling haunt of Mr. Duncan and two or three of his friends who spent their leisure hours following their favourite pursuit. Stanley resigned the secretaryship he had held for 40 years after the War, when at a time of ill-health, he felt he could no longer effectively continue the fight against the societies endeavouring to curtail the freedom of wildfowling, and against whom he had fought so hard in the past. His advice on the reorganisation of The Wildfowlers' Asosciation was closely followed and he lived to see 50 clubs spring up round the coasts, and to follow with great satisfaction efforts made in defending their sport during the passage of the recent Wild Birds Protection Act.

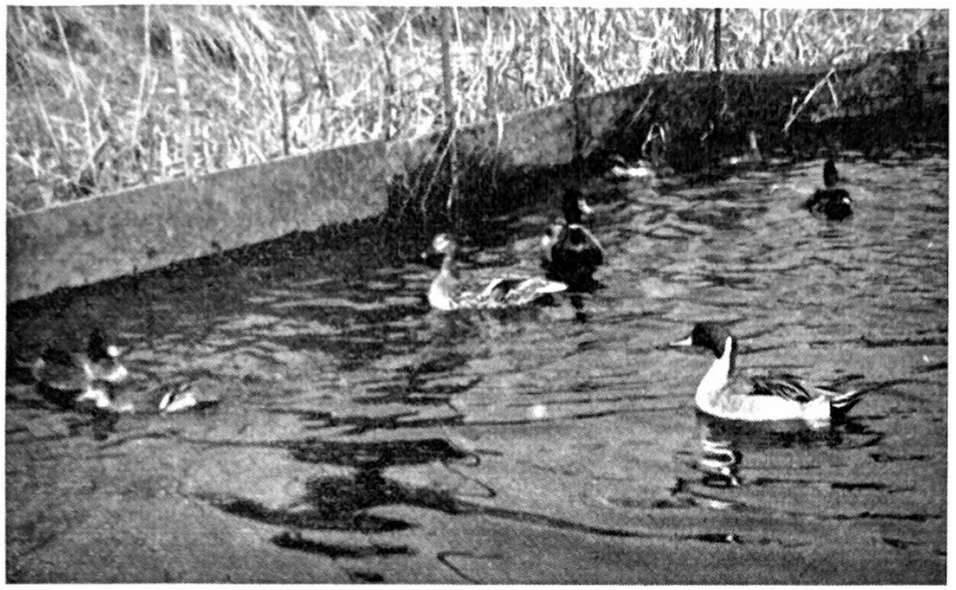
Stanley was a vice-president of W.A.G.B.I. and members were looking forward to the next annual general meeting in Hull this autumn, when we had all hoped he would be well enough to attend. He will be greatly missed; his advice was widely sought and freely given. For many years he was an adviser to the Secretary of State for Home Affairs, and served on The Wildfowl Inquiry Committee and The British Field Sports Society.

Descended from a family of wildfowlers, he was brought up under the guidance of a fatherly ornithologist, and during his long life acquired an immense knowledge of natural history, and above all was an ornithologist of the highest order. Whitehall and museum naturalists had great respect for his knowledge. He was elected a Fellow of the Zoological Society and was also an artist of note. He illustrated "The Complete Wildfowler Ashore and Afloat," a book he first published in 1911. A past president of W.A.G.B.I. considered this to be "the most comprehensive work on wildfowling ever written," and added: "This would not surprise anyone who knew the author personally. His knowledge of all forms of wildfowl and wildfowling was quite amazing, and he was only too pleased to give any advice to anyone on this subject." This book (revised and reprinted 1950) is the standard work on wildfowling today and likely to remain unsurpassed for many years to come.

Stanley Duncan (left) and "Tower-Bird" share a joke.

Mr. Duncan was an engineer by trade, and when he retired he started in the gun trade and lived to see two of his sons proprietors of one of the most successful businesses of its kind in the north of England. He was a most lovable

(Continued on page 639, col. 3)



Now swimming happily round with the other duck.

The Restless Pintail

by Barnacle

THE upper reaches of our estuary have seldom been honoured by the presence of that graceful duck, the pintail, and almost certainly never in the numbers permanently resident there during last season. Previously, Charles and I would come upon them on the open sea at the mouth of the estuary after several hours of punting down the river channels. Thus our usual view of pintail was either down the side of the long, lean barrel of the punt-gun, or through the mist of perspiration caused by a long and arduous stalk, pushing the punt against tide, or wind, or even both.

In fact one of the most exciting day's punting we have ever experienced was attempting to get a shot at a huge mass of duck, mostly pintail, on the open sea at the estuary mouth The wind was blustery and the tide ebbing fast, and finally we had to give up the game after countless attempts to avoid being carried out to sea. The trouble was that so much effort was needed to scull the punt that the movements of the sculler, straining to control the frail craft against the elements, were clearly visible to the birds, and they just lifted and dropped again several hundred yards further on. A more experienced pair of fowlers would probably have given up far sooner than we did, but that is wild-fowling all over—you learn something more every time you venture forth. The more you learn the more convinced you become that your knowledge is really only very scanty and a lifetime's apprenticeship to the craft is all too short.

One October Morning

To resume the story of last season's surprising visit of large numbers of pintail to the very head of the estuary itself. One frosty morning, late in October, we turned out of bed and dashed down to the sea-wall in our usual frantic hurry lest we had overdone it and tarried too long over breakfast. However, it was still quite dark when we arrived and we groped our way along the back of the sea-wall, stumbling into pot-holes, etc., until our eyes grew accustomed to the darkness.

Everyone has his favourite fowling place, and ours is at a bend in the estuary where a small river runs into the main channel. This is a regular flight line for mallard coming and going to the stubbles, which lie on either side of the river, stretching back several miles inland. Concealing ourselves on the seaward side of the wall, we settled down to wait for that first streak of light appearing across the estuary which would herald the start of another day.

Death of a Curlew

Almost before we had sat down, there was a whisper of wings and somewhere overhead a small party of duck slipped out unseen against the dead black of the sky, despite frantic peering. I was still listening to their wing beats fast receding seawards, when a solitary curlew almost knocked off my hat in its silent swoop over the sea-wall. The silent swoop quickly changed to a panic-stricken screech as the alarm call came simultaneously with violent evasive flight as the bird saw me. The thunderous roar of Charles' 12-bore broke in to terminate the curlew's panic, for he reaped the benefit of being more alert than I, and the bird crashed dead, to fall into a flash on the marsh.

The light had now started to break and with it came five birds flighting out from their night's feasting on the wheat stubbles, which we knew from a previous reconnoitre were situated immediately in line with our position. In the time available before they were lost in the deceptive half-light I rose to my knees and got in a shot at the rear-most bird. This fell behind me on the sand, and I swiftly dashed out and picked it up, being a firm believer in the old saying regarding "a bird in the hand, etc.," having lost birds before through neglecting to pick them up immediately. Imagine my surprise to find that the mallard I expected to pick up was a rather smaller bird of a vastly different plumage, visible even in the poor light as a drake pintail.

On my way back to my hide, I crossed to Charles and showed the bird to him. In a short discussion, we decided it must have been an odd straggler travelling in company with the mallard. There was very little more activity until it was almost daylight, when suddenly the duck started to pour out from the stubbles and we were very busy shooting at those within range of our hides. The third shot which I fired resulted in a bird tumbling to earth with an obviously broken wing. Out I dashed, just in time to see it dive into one of the smaller flashes on the marsh, and after searching carefully, I found just the nostrils showing under the overhanging grass—the rest of the bird was concealed under the water. It was a pintail duck with only a very slight wound in one wing-tip, so I wrapped her up in my hankerchief and placed her carefully inside the net of my game-bag.

By the time this was completed the flight had finished, and walking over to my friend, I discovered that he had shot three further pintail duck and a drake mallard. We sat down there on the green turf of the marsh and discussed the surprising fact that a very large number of the duck which were using the local stubbles were undoubtedly pintail, a thing unheard of in our district.

Back to the Stubbles

The next thing was our breakfast and we started on the thick bacon sandwiches and hot coffee with great gusto. However, before we had finished, I saw three duck flighting low down across the sands towards the marsh where we were still concealed amongst the reeds. They passed just wide of us as they tipped the sea-wall on their way inland. This was only the start, for very quickly on their heels came seven more, and behind them again another five, and so on until all the pintail which had previously passed over on their way out to the sanctuary of the mud-flats were now passing over again on their way back to the stubbles—to be correct, as we found out later, to one particular large wheat stubble where they fed again until disturbed by the farming activity which had not yet spread to the fields around.

As some of the very last birds passed just beyond him, Charles brought another bird tumbling down. On picking it up it was obvious that today was our lucky day, for the bird was a beautiful drake pintail, tipped only in the wing. This bird was placed carefully in my bag alongside the other, and we made plans for a speedy return home so that after attention the two new inmates could be released on the pond amongst the mallard, wigeon and teal already there, thus not spending a long time pining in the captivity of the game-bag.

On our way back, we located the field where the pintail were feeding just in time to see them rise in one mass and wing their way once more out to the flats, having been disturbed by a farm-worker entering the next field. A word with him and the gift of a couple of duck disclosed that the duck were in and out of the stubbles all day long. He had seen them at all times of day during the last week or so. This was proved to be true, and subsequently we had several good mid-day flights with the running tide moving the birds inland, before they gleaned the best stubbles clean and moved further inland, taking a different line over private marshes, thus ruling us out.

Immediately the hard frost set in at the beginning of January, the whole lot of pintail disappeared overnight, and we have not seen them since. However, we still have our pair of pintail floating serenely round the pond, settled happily amongst the other fowl, and often on a summer's night we just sit quietly talking of the mass invasion of their relations which ended as mysteriously as it began.

Cubhunting

by J. Ivester Lloyd

EVEN if a miraculous change in the weather occurred now, this year's harvest could not be an early one. There are few present-day English hunting counties which can start cubhunting until the corn is cut, although it is not absolutely essential that it should be carried as well. I have seen many a well-grown fox cub dodging hounds and followers amongst the shocks (or do you call them stooks in your part of the world?).

Standing corn, however, is always a barrier to cubhunting. When the nights are warm, foxes often lay out in the cornfields where there is more air together with a plentiful supply of food in the shape of almost anything living, from beetles to rabbits. And, if the foxes are not already in the corn, they *will be* soon after their discovery that hounds can make a woodland an uncomfortable place for them. There they will be followed by hounds, and *that* situation will lead to much whip-cracking and rating, to bad language and understandable opposition from the farmer who owns the corn, even to the temporary mental derangement of the M.F.H. Since few hunts care to risk such a terrible state of affairs, it is usual to leave the litters of cubs to go their own ways until after the harvest has been cut.

Of course, there are some hunting countries which have big woodlands where hounds can hunt and riot, huntsmen cheer and followers gallop along the ridings, cracking whips and hollering without upsetting much besides the jays and wood-pigeon. A few, too, have wide moorlands sprinkled with small coverts where it is possible to hold up foxes or to hunt them from one to the other and do no damage to anything else.

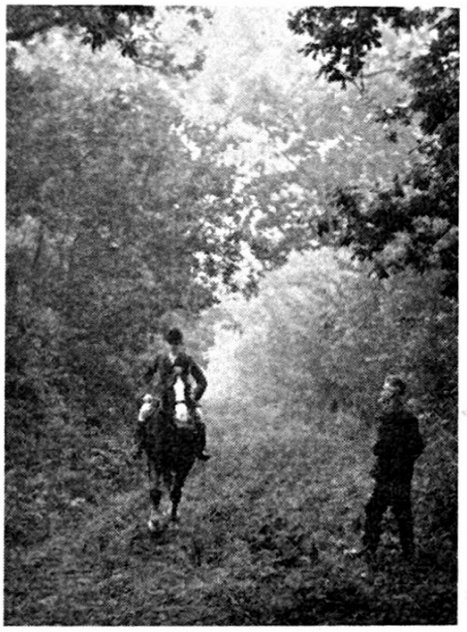
The important thing, as a Master of foxhounds remarked to me, is to *keep on* with cubhunting, once having started. There is nothing to be gained from having a morning or two in and around a covert which happens to stand amongst fields of grass or from which the harvest has been gathered and then have to call a halt because there is nowhere else to go. Cubhunting is a course of training and that, as they told us in the Service, must never be interrupted.

Importance of the Period

Few of the people who see foxhunting only after the real season has opened have much idea of the importance of the cubhunting period. Presumably, they think that a foxhound hunts fox and is reasonably free from riot without any form of preparation; that a hunter stands still in the midst of excitement when asked and refrains from kicking hounds without being taught these virtues. They may even imagine that, during the real season, a pack of hounds kill enough foxes to justify their existence to non-hunting farmers and poultry-keepers. I often think that you can gauge the true spirit of a hunt by the number of members and regular followers who turn out cubhunting.

In some counties there are not enough folks out to surround even a small covert and so the cubs have no difficulty in breaking for the open where, because of the "blindness" of the fences, the state of the ground and the crops, they cannot be followed. In others, a band of enthusiasts, both mounted and on foot, make their way through the early morning mists. These are prepared to stand on the spot where the Master places them and to keep their eyes wide open for that sharp red mask with the two cunning eyes which, sooner or later, will look out at them. When this *does* happen, they count all the morning's inconveniences, cold and damp included, well worthwhile as they shout "Hi, Charley, Charley!" in the fox's face or make other weird but effective noises to head him back.

I have heard habitual theatre-goers say that, to them, the most exciting sound is that of the strings tuning up before the overture on a first night. To me, it is the first whimper of a hound on the first morning of cubhunting It awakens something primitive in me and imprints a picture on my imagination. I think of that foxhound, somewhere deep in the still, leafy wood, pushing his way through the undergrowth, sometimes snorting to clear his nostrils. He pauses where the bracken and grass have been flattened and are still warm from the body of the fox that slept there not so long before. The scent is carried by his nose to his brain, and his mind, as



A gallop along the ride.

Masefield said, is a "memory of smells." His stern waves, he lifts his head and his excited voice is almost a scream of delight.

Other hounds, spread out through the wood, hear the cry and dash to it with a cracking of dead twigs, a swishing of leaves and they add their own notes until the trees ring with the joyful chorus. The chances are that there will be several foxes on the move, probably a litter of about four or five with their vixen, and their will be moments when the pack is divided into two or more parties. The huntsman will not worry about this so long as they are *hunting*.

Theoretical Nonsense

A great deal of nonsense is spoken and written about the sorrows of the vixen at cubhunting time, her distress at the fate of those of her cubs which are unlucky enough to be caught. I am not going to say that any fox actually *enjoys* being hunted. If I were a fox, I would hate it, but then I would also hate eating beetles and slugs and spending most of my daylight hours underground! But I am sure that few vixens are greatly worried about the fate of their cubs by the time that cubhunting has started. Like most animals, they are very tired of family duties by then and have already tried to drive their offspring away. They certainly do not wait to see what happens to their cubs. Most old foxes have heard the cry of hounds before and are soon away. They know enough about the game not to have any great fear of the human beings on the scene. I have seen an old fox run between a man's legs while that man was shouting to head a cub back.

Breaking Up the Litters

From the foxhunter's angle, there is another reason for hunting these so-called cubs in this manner. (All foxes born this year are "cubs" until the first of November). It is to break up and scatter the litters and to put it into the heads of those which survive that the only way to avoid the fate of their less fortunate brothers and sisters is to get going and keep going as soon as they hear hounds in covert.

Young hounds learn their business during cubhunting. They need little teaching if they are bred right and, since, nothing benefits more from example than a hound or dog, the old hounds are their tutors. They learn at the same time what things are taboo; the meaning of "Ware riot!" "Ware haunch!" and "Ware hare!"

Young horses and others fresh up from grass become accustomed to the sight and sound of hounds, the note of the horn and all the other frenzies of a hunting morning. They come to love these things and to connect them with pleasant action, but they also learn to stand still in the midst of them when asked and not to worry if an eager young hound dashes through their legs. Actually, I have been told by an expert horseman that the best schooling for a young hunter is being ridden to harriers, but we are now thinking of cubhunting.

For myself, whose riding experience is as limited as my skill in the saddle, I like to put on stout boots and anklets and go cubhunting on my own feet. I am then able to give all my attention to hounds, foxes and hunting, to revel in the atmosphere, to shout, proudly to holloa "Tally-ho back!" when I have turned a cub.

Then there are those keen lads—and lasses too—who love a dig. Who delight in seeing a game terrier doing its work and who are willing to handle spade, pick and crowbar for hours when a fox has got to ground in what to some of us imagine is an impregnable place. This is the opportunity to try out a young terrier. All of us are out because we enjoy watching and hearing hounds and, if one has a dog which has not yet been entered, then everybody, the M.F.H. included, will be patient while we introduce it to the earth.

I have mentioned some of the objects of cubhunting, breaking up litters, teaching foxes to run, reducing their numbers; entering young hounds, accustoming horses and hounds to each other, trying young terriers. I seldom go out myself without thinking that another object is often achieved. I mean that of teaching a few followers who do not already know it that there is more to foxhunting than just riding to hounds.

Anyhow, everybody enjoys cubhunting and, even when sport itself is indifferent, I have yet to see a gloomy face at this easy-going, cheerful game.

Thousands of infected rabbits killed last week in the corn cutting on Derbyshire farms were burned or buried by farmers. Last year, rabbits sold for hundreds of pounds but the Derbyshire housewives are frightened of myxomatosis and refuse to buy.

Waiting outside Gourdon harbour for the tide to flow.

Round the Game Preserves

by David Imrie

AT the moment I am right beside the watery game preserves of the Kincardineshire coast, and enjoying the contrast from the usual inland scene immensely. Even the weather has collaborated to make this contrast more enjoyable than I expected; for the sun, almost invisible during the greater part of this humid summer, is now shining beautifully on the calm sea, on the steep jumble of houses which is the village of Gourdon, and on the gorse-covered hill beyond, where the rabbits live, free so far from the devastating plague of myxomatosis. But how long they will remain free is a matter for speculation. Already this loathsome disease has reached lower Deeside, and reliable reports indicate that it is also rife at Menmuir a few miles from Brechin. Both of these places are only 20 miles or thereby from here; so the outlook for the coney population is rather grim.

This outbreak is having repercussions on the whole rabbit trade of this countryside, and last week a butcher in Union Street, Aberdeen, announced on a placard that his rabbits were guaranteed to come from the Buchan district. Despite this and similar assurances, however, many people are refusing to eat rabbit; so trapping may come to a standstill, and myxomatosis may not prove to be such a boon as many ignorant people imagine.

At Low Water

This morning the tide is exceptionally low, and the harbour in front of me is so clear of water that one could walk across it dry-shod. In fact, a lobster fisherman did walk over the mud a few minutes ago to his grounded boat to repair some of his gear but otherwise the harbour is empty; for the seine net and line yawls went off before daybreak to their fishing areas beyond the horizon. Some of the early comers are now lying at anchor in the channel that cuts the reef of rocks beyond the breakwater. They swing lazily on the glittering tide while the crews sit on the warm decks redding their lines, or doing other necessary jobs until the water rises sufficiently high to let them discharge their cargoes of fish on the quay.

In front of the yawls, but outside the harbour too, is the salmon coble. It has a flat bottom, which allows it to approach the rocks more closely than the yawls; so all except two of the crew are invisible. Probably the absent ones are off to H.Q. with a load of nets, because although the net fishing season has still a week or two to go, at the time of writing, this lifting of gear has to be undertaken in stages, so that the operation is completed on the appointed date. I had a talk with the salmon fishers last week, and they said that their catch here had been less than average.

Catches of Sea-Trout

They did assure me, nevertheless, that the stations immediately to north and to south of them had done well. At Inverbervie the hauls from the standing bag nets had apparently been augmented greatly by sea-trout from the drag net which the fishers had operated in the bay near the estuary in the early mornings and late evenings. A boy angler who happened to be up before the lark one morning saw them land 20 sea-trout and a few flounders from one sweep of the net. Incidentally, the fishing dispute between the Town Council of Inverbervie and the owner of the salmon rights on the coast, which I mentioned some time ago, has been smoothed out in a practical as well as in a theoretical fashion; and a system of permits is now in force, to the satisfaction of everyone.

The tide is beginning to flow now. While I have been writing this article (on a borrowed typewriter which I can hardly use) it has crept unobtrusively into the harbour. Soon the fish sales will begin, and the staccato patter of the salesmen will mingle with the creaking of winches as the boxes are hauled up from the holds, and dumped on the pier. It will mingle also with the incredible babel of wireless sets going at full blast, transmitting and receiving, below decks; for most of these yawls have two-way radio communication with their homes and with boats that sail from other ports. The other day I listened to the torrent of nautical jargon from one of the yawls, and I thought for a moment that I was hearing foreign tongues, because the language was further distorted by dialect words and local intonations. Recently, one of those Gourdon skippers got "a round of the guns," as he picturesquely put it, for singing at the top of his voice while his transmitter was "live." The reprimand came from the authorities who grant licences for those short-wave sets; and the skipper was warned that any further music-hall efforts from him might result in the withdrawal of his licence.

Feverish Activity

In the fish curing and processing sheds around the quay the staffs are working at high pressure. They are always working in this feverish fashion when fish are plentiful and the market brisk, so that the most may be made of a perishable commodity while the going is good. Fortunately, ice is comparatively cheap at 1s. 6d. per barrel, if it is bought in bulk; but transport charges from the factory in Aberdeen increase that figure slightly.

However, it is ice which makes the metaphorical wheels of a fish processing business run smoothly. A few shovels of ice in each box of fish at the end of a working day ensures a job for the staffs until the fresh landings arrive; and a shovel of ice on the top of each box of fillet and cutlets that have to travel by train helps to keep them in prime condition for the consumer. A dozen yards from me now nine women and four men are cutting up fish, mainly whiting and haddock, which were iced down yesterday. For some obscure reason those kinds of fish are being caught in large quantities this week. One boat, for example, got 40 boxes of whiting and haddock from a single pull of the seine net. Next week, or in a few weeks hence, the catch may be practically all codlings from the same fishing grounds. No one can give me a satisfactory explanation for this seeming inconsistency among the denizens of the deep.

This fish business is, as far as I can see, even more tricky than supplying a variable market with rabbits in the height of summer. A good trapper can contrive to catch just sufficient rabbits to meet his commitments, so that his losses are never serious; but a fish merchant can easily cancel most of his profit, unless he exercises a lot of foresight. Even then, the shrewdest calculations can be nullified by uncertain weather which may keep the yawls in harbour for days. For instance, my brother-in-law was so overwhelmed with big supplies of small fish recently that he disposed of his surplus to the fish meal factory, because he could normally get better quality from the local landings the following morning. Alas! that same night a furious gale arose from the north, and the fishing fleet was confined to harbour, with the result many orders had to be cut. So one can see that the fish trade is something of a gamble. Those small fish that were sold at offal rates to the fish meal factory would have paid handsome profits during the temporary famine.

Once, in my ignorance of this ticklish trade, I suggested that an outsize refrigerator could be used to balance supply and demand, but my relative pointed out that he might stuff a refrigerator with fish and find that fresh landings were being maintained for months. This would certainly be a drawback, because the quality of fish is not improved by deep freezing. In fact, haddock in summer are getting a type of food which makes their flesh tend to become pulpy if it lies in crushed ice for even a few days. Therefore, indefinite freezing would lower its value considerably.

However, I do not need to worry unduly about the vagaries of the fish trade. I can concentrate on enjoying the comings and goings of those who get their living from the sea; and

(Continued on page 633, col. 3)

Where the land closes in on the estuary.

Duck on the Barley

by R. D. Humber

DAWN was breaking as Don and I neared the end of the public footpath leading to the cove wood and the foreshore. A public footpath is sometimes nearly as precious to the wildfowler as a lifeline is to a sailor, and this particular one, praise be to the vigilance of certain local moss-side natives, is included in the new ordinance survey map.

It was a still, misty break of day and curlew called uneasily beyond the earth and stone ramparts of the sea-wall. Don, who stalks like a Redskin, and takes instant notice of the signs of nature, slunk up to the banking and peered over the top. He beckoned me on, obviously agitated by keen excitement. I came up to him just in time to see a big fox sidle around the tide-washed rocks and disappear into the cove wood, a few curlew mobbing it into cover. "A girt dog fox, did you see him, just out of range?" he growled. He is a stalwart of all the local fox drive shoots in the estuary country which the fell hound packs do not hunt.

We crossed over the sea-wall, Don walking higher up the estuary foreshore, while I lay in waiting beside a spur of rock sticking out of the sands near the river channel. I squatted behind the rock and listened intently to the gossip of the fowl on the mist veiled flashes and mudbanks. In the lull of curlew wailing and the bleating and piping of redshank and oyster-catcher, I heard the low voices of mallard, a continuous *wark-wark-wark,* now and then rising to a high note as the drakes showed off with a shouting cry. Away down the estuary sounded a burst of greylag notes, a small gaggle of some fifteen geese lifted from the sandbars and departed inland—big dim shapes ghosting through the drifting mist. I wondered if the mallard would lift from the channel and flight my way, there was obviously a mighty big party of them on the river and banks.

Along the Tideline

The rooks and carrion crows commenced to flight across the estuary, pausing, as is their custom, on the mudflats to gossip and wrangle over some tidal titbit left by the sweep of the sea. The queer wooden-rattle, notes of a crow echoed far and loud over the sandflats—a most peculiar cry never heard like that in the woodlands. A loud swishing of wings and legs beating in the channel prepared me for action. The mallard were up, and what a host of them. Don had put them up by clapping his hands. Many of them came in successive waves over my rock like grouse over the butts on the moor—a dream of a mallard flight. I swung my single barrel on to the leader of a party of five, and a big drake slumped and nose-dived with a thump beside the channel. I poked badly in my next few shots, then a duck dropped, and I collected that and watched the rest of the birds stream seawards above the channel. Shots came from higher up—Don was busy. I made a rough count that some five hundred mallard had passed my rock when the flight ended; never before have I seen so many duck in our small estuary.

Tracks in the Wet Sand

Don slithered towards me over the sticky mud round the headland, five mallard in his hand. His long, expressive, brick-red face smiling at me in jubilation—it had been an exciting morning.

We always conduct an inquest upon the slain, to see where the birds have been hit and to examine their condition. What beauties they were, those four resplendent drakes with their purple wing-flashes, silken green heads, ruddy brown breasts, grey bellies, and seaweed coloured bills.

The mist had now dispersed to reveal a blue sky, the rising sun gilded the drab sands. We tracked the fox's pad-marks, long claws scruffing the sand, and found signs to indicate that he had successfully stalked a mallard far out on the mudflats, where a ruffle of feathers marked his kill. Walking back along the footpath we saw where another nocturnal hunter had paused through the night—the broad five-toed web marks of an otter were imprinted in the ooze on the far side of the big dyke.

On the drive home through the mosses and dykelands, Don pondered long and deeply and muttered his thoughts aloud. "I'd like to know where those mallard are feeding, happen their crops will give us a clue." And they certainly did give us a clue, every duck was gorged with barley, and as barley fields are not common on the estuary borders, a little discreet detective work gave us the information that a certain twelve-acre barley field near the sea-wall higher up the estuary had, through the wet summer, never been harvested. It was odds on that we had discovered the source of attraction.

Morning Flight

Before dawn next morning, with a south-westerly gale blowing, we trudged round the estuary cove, over the slippery slob-grass and gutters to the rushes on the saltings opposite the barley field. Derek, a hefty ex-gamekeeper friend, as keen as mustard on fowling, had joined us. When the sky showed a glimmering of light grey in the east, we had each chosen a hide in the rushes two hundred yards apart.

Above the wild gusting of the gale I heard Derek home his first shot of dawn, and a fat mallard drake hit the mud behind the rushes. Six more duck whirled into the rushes, as flight after flight came over and kept Don and I busy firing from peculiar angles crouching behind the scanty cover. In the pale, storm-racked sky a dozen or so grey lags hove in from their nightly roost on the far salt marsh across the estuary; they dipped over the barley and battled out again, heaving in the wind right over Derek. His gun boomed and the leading goose whirled down, rump over beak, and its companions winged wildly, rapidly gaining height, as his second barrel missed.

We were surprised, when we examined the

Don, who stalks like a Redskin.

total bag of eight duck, and one goose, that six of the duck were pintail. As we walked back over the mudflats, duck continued to flight inland to the barley in broad daylight, confounding the normal habits of wildfowl. Careful scrutiny revealed that the majority of the scores we saw were pintail, much like the mallard in flight, but more slender in outline and showing more white underneath. The great congregation of immigrant mallard seemed to have left the estuary overnight for another haven, and a large number of pintail had come in to take their place. Seldom is the mouse-grey and white, long-necked pintail a common bird in our small hill-bounded estuary.

Count Your Blessings

by Gerald Staddon

"YES," sighed my friend, "I wish to heaven I were in his position." We had been discussing the man who rented nearly two thousand acres of the best game preserves in this part of the country, and my friend was comparing this magnificence with his own small rough shoot, to the detriment of the latter. Now, it is indisputable that the owner of a large well-stocked preserve is indeed a fortunate man, but is he more blessed than the small rough shooter? It depends on one's enthusiasm of course, but I would say in most cases that the answer is emphatically no. My own wild acres hold few pheasants; if I see a dozen throughout the season, and shoot half of them, I congratulate myself and walk with my head in the clouds. Neither does it hold much other game, perhaps an odd covey or two of partridges, and a few 'cock may brighten my existence. Still, it is my shoot, and I do not wish for a better.

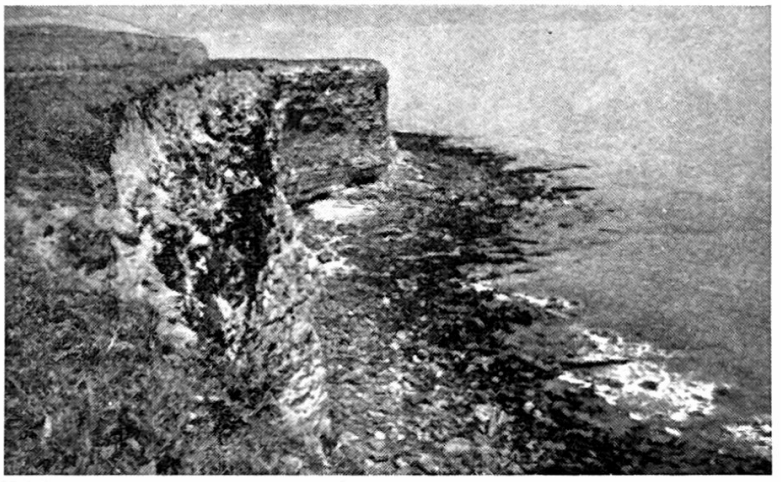
I do not envy the wealthy man his teeming coverts, nor do I sigh for the opulence of the partridge manor. I have not the time; I am far too busy hunting and outwitting the wily old cock pheasant who may stray on to my ground, to covert the hundred streaming over some more fortunate brother's land. Besides, I have sufficient wisdom to know that my bird, when I do eventually get it, is immeasureably more valuable, for I have got to know it well. Have we not duelled our way through the greater part of the season, and have I not saluted and admired it when it has slipped out of many a tight corner, leaving only the echo of its derisive cackle to challenge still further my endeavours? Yes, my old cock when I shoot it, is the rich reward for a personal achievement, an especially honoured adversary, not just another bird to be thrown into the game-cart.

The Odds Are Great

That is where the "hunter's" advantage lays. I know quite well the thrill of standing under high, fast pheasants, and a joy it is, too; but give me the hunting and out-generalling of one lone cock over an area of rough cover. Nothing on this earth can make the blood race leaping and exulting through my veins as such a challenge. No astute keepers, no plodding line of beaters, brings my bird to me. I alone, and my dog, have to go out and get it. The odds are great; so much the better, but I am fulfilling my heritage and joining the chase. With that I am content, and no man shall count himself richer.

It is to the woods I turn when the madding crowd becomes intolerable. I never enter one without feeling that he who walks within its quiet glades with gun in hand and dog at heel is thrice blessed. I like to feel the glow of primeval emotion that enfolds me, as I move enchanted into its depths, and the glorious uncertainty of what I shall find there. Who could really wish for company in such surroundings? The human voice grates harshly against a background of whispering firs, and Adonis cuts a very sorry figure beside a silver birch. No! I must have only my dog, she, and only she, is fitted to carry on the craft and heritage bequeathed us by our fathers from the dim, mist-surrounded long-ago. Each of us is complementary to the other, alone we are lacking, together we combine resources and hold our own with the most cunning. It is she who, when bidden, enters the maze of brambles and relentlessly pushes out the reluctant rabbit, but it is I who glimpse and halt the silent evasive dash to the shelter of the nearby bracken.

Who among us cannot remember the thrill of being the youthful redskin, stalking and belly-crawling through the long, sweet-smelling summer grass to pounce on, and scalp the unsuspecting cowboy waiting in patient ambush? That boyish excitement is still with me as I stalk slowly and silently through the thin cover of a December wood towards the sturdy oak, with its ever-vigilant pigeon sitting motionless and silent on its sky-etched branches. I glance behind and see my shadow crawling, belly to the ground, as aware as her master of the necessity for the slow, imperceptible approach to our quarry. I look at her and see in those shining eyes the same suppressed excitement that is possessing me. Slowly, inch by inch, taking advantage of the slightest cover, we move closer in. Presently Judy sits to a whispered command, and I continue alone the last few vital yards. My heart jumps, and I freeze instantly as one of those white-ringed necks is turned, and head cocked in my direction. I can feel the blood singing in my ears, as I hold my breath, and watch from under lowered lids, the wily bird, stretching and craning to identfy the vague something that has aroused its suspicions. At the end of eternity the bird relaxes into the same posture as its fellows, its suspicions lulled and betrayed by my stealth and cunning. Sometimes I feel, too, the bitter frustration as I hear the staccato clap of wings, and see the brief flash of white and blue as they roll and swerve away behind the indulgent tree, when another yard would have brought success.



The cormorants' roosting place mentioned in the article.

Choosing a Hide

Quite different but equally joyous, is the ambush. I like to choose my hide where I can look over the intervening fields to the neighbouring wood, and see the birds scatter out, and flee in panic from the sound of shots. I watch the aimless grey dots fading and appearing against the light and shade, see them turn and head purposefully towards my decoys set high in the trees behind me. I love the expectation of their coming, and the call upon my skill to turn the high-swooping dive to the lures into a plummeting wing-folded plunge as one, or perhaps two, thud on to the leave-cushioned earth.

Company of Friends

I like, too, to watch, silent and unseen, from the concealing hide, the business and the pleasures of the nature world around me, the noisy jay hopping and flitting from tree to tree, which on other occasions would certainly pay with its life, but on this contemplative day merely adding to my pleasure. The sudden alertness and recoil of the old crow which was leisurely about to fly within range, and the rustle and shiver of leaves as a rabbit moves in slow, unhurried hops to the seat under the ivy-clad moot. I like the sudden return to reality, as a pigeon for some unknown reason comes rushing and swerving low through the trees, when only the swiftest snap can send it rolling over and over as it hits the ground.

There are days when the company of friends enhances and blesses an otherwise exclusive pursuit of happy hours. I recall I sat behind Ron's motor-cycle chugging protestingly along the snow-covered icy lane. He was taking me to the farm of his ministering angel where for years he has been a welcome and trusted friend, to shoot, and to come and go as his heart desires. The friendliness of the long, low cider house, was matched only by the kindness and simplicity of our host's welcome while the cider, rich from the rays of our Devonshire sun, glowed and tingled in our bodies, chilled by the cold ride through the frosty air.

I had never shot there before, but I knew that whatever came our way, I should be placed where I would have the lion's share. The four of us, Farmer Sid, his son Gordon, with a face reddened by the wind and the rain, and strong as an ox, but with the gentle courtesy of those who live on, and for the land, Ron, and myself were to guard a long strip of mixed wood, mostly oak and birch, with here and there a few firs and pines. Guns had been placed for some considerable distance round, and we hoped to give a good reception to any pigeon driven our way. We were not overwhelmed, but nevertheless had a most pleasant day. The bag was small, but the shots we did have were of high quailty, and for me anyway, the day remains a joy in retrospect. Good companions, pleasant surroundings and the unfamiliar snow covering our green, Devon countryside, made a refreshing and welcome change for one of solitary habits.

For Ron in particular it was an unusual day, for as he waited, watchful and alert, for pigeon, three deer suddenly appeared and raced past him, one of which was bowled over stone-dead, by an expertly-placed shot. They had no doubt been disturbed and separated from the herd which had been doing considerable damage in the district.

In due course, my kin and I sat down and ate the meal esteemed by our forebears, roast

(Continued on page 639, col. 2)

On Shooting Woodcock

by Eeltap

WHEN discussing woodcock, I have often said that, whereas they generally seem to be considered so phenominally difficult to shoot, I had always found them quite the easiest of all "game" birds. I am by no means an outstanding shot, but I do get an outstanding average with 'cock, and all because I do not allow them to become difficult. By the time that many people have decided to fire, the shot has admittedly become a very difficult one—and frequently dangerous as well. It is chiefly to the woodcock itself, with its often erratic mode of flight, that we must attribute our measure of success or failure when trying to shoot it. From the moment that they are flushed in covert they jink, twist and swerve.

Darting first here and then there, as fast as driven partridges, they *appear* only to be flitting ahead like an owl, or a bat. It is by a combination of this crooked flight, the nature of the surroundings, and the general circumstances in which they appear amongst the guns, that most people get defeated. If only a snap shot were taken, there would be no time to make all the fatal shooting errors into which this bird can lead us. Shoot at once, whenever you see the bird in range, not hastily (never do that), but at once; do not wait for what you think may be a better chance. Never raise your gun until you are ready to shoot, and on no account follow the bird with your pointing gun.

In this connection, what applies for other birds does not for woodcock. All the compromises and alternatives entailing any fraction of delay are unsound, however well vindicated. With other birds there are many excellent and almost necessary reasons for acting otherwise, but always remember that you may never see that particular woodcock again.

Shooting Safety

You will sometimes, when too late to stop yourself from firing, realise that you are shooting straight into a tree-trunk which the woodcock is behind. Never worry over that. Use your second barrel, and if you do the same again, just wish "good luck" to the bird, and wait for the next. Never think "If only I'd waited," or that you have wasted cartridges. In the long run, you will waste far fewer cartridges and kill more birds by using the "instantaneous" method.

Also, what is much more important of all, you will never cause an accident. You will never shoot another man, provided that he is in his proper place, which you are reasonably entitled to assume. Otherwise, it is either his own, the host's, or the gamekeeper's fault—not yours! That is why the discipline and control of a line of guns or beaters is of such desperate importance in all shooting, and particularly with woodcock the eccentricities of which make them so proverbially dangerous.

You must have a definite and continuous knowledge of that exact zone wherein it is safe to shoot, and if even slightly doubtful, remember that this is the most dangerous shot of all. When a bird appears it is useless to start *wondering;* you must *know*. Whatever you may want to hit with a shot gun, or any other weapon, must essentially have your undivided concentration.

Another point, always make a bird's bill your target, and resist the natural temptation to treat a bird as a bull's-eye, shooting at its centre, or biggest part. With a woodcock's prominent bill, this is easier than may be the case with most birds. One pellet in its head and it is yours.*

Accordingly, when walking in line, or standing at a drive, the instant that you sight a woodcock within range in your safety zone, there should happen, within two or three seconds, a blend of the following actions, and the bird should drop dead. Eyes should go first on the beak, and according to the bird's pace and distance, they must always give that beak an undefinable lead, the amount of which must be learnt by experience, but you will very quickly learn. What does matter is that you *do* automatically give some lead at least. Your forefinger should go to the trigger, and your body through your left arm should swing your gun past the mark. Just a fraction before passing the mark, an extra pressure should "release" the trigger, on no account checking the swing or follow-through of the gun—no bustle, jerk or any apparent effort. Should you want as good an illustration as any I know, watch a first-class batsman hitting boundaries, or any expert ball-game player in action—racquets is possibly best of all. The correct way for hitting any moving object with your feet or hands, or any instrument held in them, is always the same—concentration, balance, and perfect body-swing. The secret key to this, if people will only endeavour to remember it, always lies in *footwork*.

The cause of shrieks and halloas from the beaters.

Acceleration Rapid

Unlike most other small birds, and like most large and therefore conspicuous ones, the woodcock flies much faster than is apparent, and its acceleration is very rapid and deceptive. Disbelievers, if young and active, should just *try* once to catch up with one. Older men might try what figure they can count before the bird disappears; pace the distance, and do the arithmetic at home. There are two main causes for shots going consistently behind. The commonest is the gun swinging too slowly, or often not swinging at all. The other is that people often completely underestimate the speed of some birds.

There are cases, where woodcock cross certain narrow gaps too quickly for any shooter to "sight" them, raise his gun and give them the necessary lead. Before he can possibly fire, the bird has disappeared. If, in some particular stand, it will obviously occur always in the same place, it is worth devising a system of trapping them—almost what machine gunners call "firing on fixed lines." Whenever the bird appears, fire straight at the opposite side of the clearing, or even if the covert is thin enough, shoot into that. If and when you can get the correct timing, you will cut off the bird, which will fly straight into your shot.

A Noisy Welcome

No. 7 shot is the best size for killing woodcock. It gives the completely adequate killing power combined with the maximum volume of shot. If you expect any tougher game, for which you prefer bigger shot, anything, including No. 4s are quite satisfactory, though completely superfluous and a serious sacrifice against woodcock.

No small contribution to bad woodcock shooting comes from the state of over-excitement which this bird almost universally manages to create. If the beaters could poke Hitler out of a holly bush and make him fly over the guns, he could hardly get a noisier welcome. The chorus of shrieks and holloas which so often herald its appearance, give no help to anyone, but only fluster many who would otherwise probably have shot the bird. Instead, in their confusion, they hold their fire, miss, or take a dangerous shot before they know it. Many more are holload off woodcock than are holload on to them.

The importance of good shooting management and safety discipline cannot possibly be exaggerated—its effect upon everybody's shooting is tremendous. If anybody, good shot or bad, does not possess a reasonable foreknowledge that, within his own safety zone, he can give his undivided concentration to the bird, he will lack that confidence, without which all shooting is hopeless.

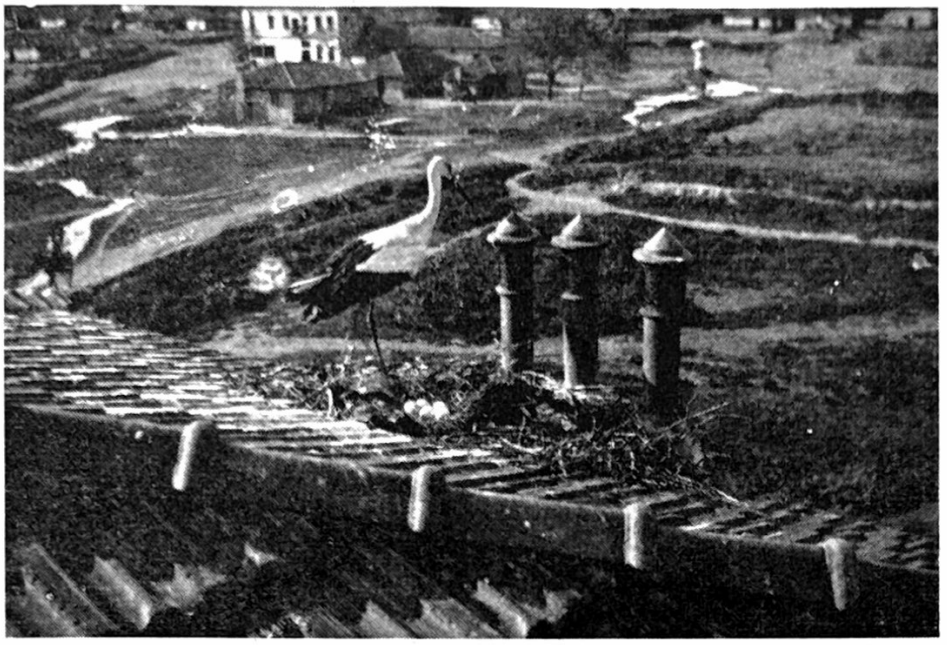
So, for woodcock shooting, my summarised prescription would be this. Your zone of safety must be clearly and constantly in your mind. Your eyes should *never, never, never* leave the moving spot which you want to hit. Your gun should swing naturally, as a part of your whole body, the swing emanating from your feet. The trigger must be pressed *during*, and not after the swing. Without a semblance of rush or fluster, shoot as early as you can.

If you miss, the bird may have dodged out of the shoot, which is just unlucky, or your forward allowance may be incorrect, which you can often see. 'Cock will usually shiver at a shot ahead, and, if behind, they will probably accelerate.

The many other faults in shooting are not peculiar to woodcock. Whereas the basic shooting rules are for everything, the peculiarities of woodcock are inapplicable to any other Britsh bird. Even the snipe, in most other ways so comparable, is no exception here.

* *But can you see the bill of a going-away 'cock?—Ed.*

Mr. R. A. Philcox, a Lewes, Sussex, vet. is, according to a newspaper report, fighting a lone battle locally against myxomatosis. He has recently innoculated his first batch of wild rabbits against the disease and turned them loose. They had been caught for him by a gamekeeper. He intends to innoculate batches of wild rabbits daily on the downs. "I am determined to cut down suffering and death among them," he said.



A white stork on her nest in a Macedonian village.

Macedonian Memories

by Kenneth Dawson

EVERY time November approaches, my thoughts fly back adown the, alas, ever-increasing tally of years to that month in 1915, always memorable to me for two reasons. First, the 27th of that month was the date of the famous blizzard which swept Macedonia and Gallipoli, and caused so much suffering and not a few deaths in the British Armies in those theatres. Second, it was the first time I had ever heard the wild, houndlike chorus of the grey geese, most thrilling of all nature's sounds.

I had landed that morning in drizzling rain after a summer in Egypt, and marched with 600 horses and mules to a camping site at the 8th kilo on the Monastir Road. Here we found the picketing lines which should have been erected were non-existent, and as all our own gear was in the bottom of the ship's hold, and did not arrive until after midnight, I was in a nice mess, for I had only half the squadron personnel and four animals to a man.

Towards nightfall, the rain stopped, the wind went into the north and began to blow, the first of the Vardar gales which are such a feature of the winter, and then to snow, fine blizzard stuff which cut like needles. Our tents, hastily erected by a fatigue party from another unit before we arrived, soon collapsed under the dual strains of the gale and loose animals tripping over the ropes, and it was as I struggled out of the ruins of mine sometime after midnight that I thrilled to the wild music of geese.

Lived With the Geese

For the next four winters I lived cheek by jowl with the geese in various parts of Macedonia. I flighted them, drove them, and shot one while I was standing at the doorway of my tent in pyjamas as the skeins flighted low down against a Varder gale. It fell in the mule lines, and nearly caused a stampede of these temperamental hybrids.

It seems curious that all the many geese I shot, or saw shot, in Macedonia with two exceptions were *Anser Erythropus,* the lesser white-fronted, quite unmistakable because they had the short, 1.5 inch, pinkish-white bill and orange feet and legs, whereas the kindred species, *Albifrons* has a much longer bill, 2.25 inches in length, and this, and the feet and legs, are yellow. In size, however, they were much nearer the usual weight of the latter, adults going 5-6lb. Backhouse in "A Handbook of European Birds" has a footnote that both species are variable in size.

The exceptions were one grey-lag, which another officer shot while duck flighting in the Galiko Marshes, and a bean, which I killed when it was flying with a skein of lesser white-fronts. I never saw a pink-foot or heard of one being killed.

Migrating Grey-Lags

A few big geese, almost certainly grey-lag, arrived in October, but they soon passed on, probably to Spain, where Abel Chapman found them in such vast numbers, and described the sport in that enthralling book "Wild Spain." The vast skeins of white-fronts usually began to appear in late November, although one year there were very few to be seen until after Christmas.

Their favourite feeding grounds were the patches of autumn-sown corn on the outskirts of the villages scattered about the Varder plain. Here the young green shoots were a few inches in height by the time the geese arrived, and I have seen acres which looked as though geese had been penned upon them, so short were they cropped and so foul the ground with droppings. I found they could be driven quite successfully, and when I was free in the afternoon I used to sally forth with an orderly and two mounted beaters to look for geese. Often I had a pretty good idea of where to find them as my rough-riding sergeant had orders to keep a look out for gaggles when he was out with exercise parties in the forenoon.

Macedonian agriculture in those days was as primitive as in biblical times. The light, wooden plough did little more than scratch the soil an inch or two deep. Often it was drawn by a mixed team of a small ox and a donkey. I once saw a woman and an ass doing the work while their lord and master guided the plough. Fresh ground was tilled every year, and so if a patch of scrub was in the area it was simply by-passed, and thus afforded cover for me in the otherwise dead flat almost treeless plain.

Having spotted a feeding gaggle, we would ride until about 200 yards from it, and then I would drop off my horse, while it was still moving, on the blind side to the geese, into a convenient piece of cover, while the others, having marked my hide well, made a detour to get behind the birds and begin the drive. I found it was quite useless trying to drive them against the wind if it was strong, for they invariably either went back over the beaters' heads, or broke away on the flanks once they were airborne.

A Wildfowl Paradise

When first we arrived in Macedonia the geese were extraordinarily unsuspicious of people either riding or in wagons, doubtless because they had been accustomed for countless generations to seeing the local inhabitants, very few of whom had firearms, passing on their tiny ponies and donkeys or in the clumsy ox-drawn wains. One day when out with an exercise party we rode within less than a dozen yards of ten geese without putting them up.

I wonder whether the wonderful marshes between the Salonika-Athens railway line and the left bank of the Varder are still in existence? They were formed each winter when the floods come down the River Galiko, which was dry in its lower reaches for most of the summer. It had no proper mouth and the water spread out over the flat land for the last two miles before it reached the sea, forming shallow lagoons studded with sedges

A typical Macedonian shepherd.

and beds of tall reeds, a veritable wildfowl paradise, where on occasions the amount of shooting, and in daylight too, was only limited by the number of cartridges one could raise.

This land was incredibly rich. In spring the wild white clover grew three feet in height, and on the sites of the many sheep kraals where the flocks had wintered the thistles were 9-10 feet high. We used to ride through these sometimes in the early morning to drive out the jackals, and then gallop them down on

(Continued on page 639, col. 3)

Gun Gossip

by North Country

I HAVE received from B.S.A. Guns Ltd., of Birmingham, a leaflet concerning two of their new range of high-power shooting rifles. These rifles are chambered for the American .222 Rem. cartridges and the well-known high velocity .22 Hornet cartridge. In the letter it is explained that the receiver body is dovetailed to acute telescopic sight mounts and these mounts are available from the factory either for the 1 inch, 26mm or 26¼mm telescopic sight tube. It adds: "The high comb stock gives perfect shooting comfort with a telescope using these quick detachable mounts. For more general shooting use, the Continental style of rifle is offered."

The leaflet is an attractive production which gives details and illustrations of these rifles. Here is an extract: "Streamlined to conform with modern requirements, the B.S.A. Hunter possesses a clean, graceful appearance and perfect balance, which with other advanced design features and superior craftsmanship, superbly combine to produce a weapon eminently suited to the needs of the most discriminating sportsman." While I have not yet handled one of these new rifles, I like the appearance of them. And, as it happens, I have for some time felt that the answer to some of our problems would be found in something of the kind. While these rifles are designed primarily for export, there are many occasions in this country where a weapon of more power than an ordinary .22 is needed—and at a reasonable figure. I am not referring to deer stalking, for which we are well provided. In *safe* hands such rifles can be used in the usual kind of country. After all in unsafe or irresponsible hands no weapon is safe—in any kind of country. I should add that this rifle is a bolt action magazine weapon, the magazine has a capacity of five rounds in .22 Hornet, four rounds in .222 Rem. and has a well-designed safety-catch. The barrel length is 24 inches and the barrel weight 2lb. 9ozs. The standard sighting is a three-leaf open nearsight and a bead foresight mounted on a "milled" vamp. All the well-known makes of aperture nearsights can be attached. The overall weight is 7lb. 4oz.

I have just received a letter from a reader who complains that he is not doing very well at driven grouse—for which shooting he happens to be a fortunate guest. I wish indeed that I could do something to help him, for I realise how he must feel in a matter of this kind. Who has not been through some such experience in his time? I for one have and I have been really unhappy about it. It is so awkward if you are a guest at important shoot and are unable to make the grade! For however kind and charming your host may be, you know that inwardly he must feel disappointed at your performance. And then you begin to think of all the money he has spent in order to provide you with the apportunity for such sport.

This reader, it appears, cannot single out and deal with his birds in time. He allows a covey to be right over or even past his butt before he gets his first shot off. This is a serious loss of good shooting time which is fatal to bag making. In a similar condition I think I should resolve to get my gun off at some bird out in front and handsomely miss it rather than let this fatal hesitancy get the better of me. In other words "break the ice" at any price and fire away. This should soon lead to birds being killed out in front.

This is a case which can only be broken down by sheer determination. The "patient" must cure himself—he must break himself of this fatal habit. I dare say if he were in a sunken butt and birds appeared over the skyline at short range, he might find matters a little less difficult. There would be less time in which to think and to hesitate. The sight of birds advancing a long way out in front does exercise a kind of stupifying influence on some people who seem to become half mesmerised until it is too late. When they "wake up" there is little left for them to do beyond killing the odd bird behind. It is all most unsatisfactory.

However, I hope the next time I hear from this reader there will be better news. If he makes up his mind to fire soon enough, he should suddenly find himself doing it. And I feel sure he will then begin to kill his first bird nicely out in front.

☆ ☆ ☆

Scotland's Red Deer—

by F. W. Sadler

A NEW survey of Scotland's red deer is being undertaken by Dr. Fraser Darling, fairly recently returned from Alaska after investigating the grazing ranges of the caribou, moose, and reindeer. The population of Scotland's red deer has always been a matter of conjecture, but in 1923, Mr. Allan Gordon estimated it to be round 150,000, while in 1941, the Deer Controller for Scotland, Mr. Frank Wallace, put the figure nearer the 200,000 mark.

Scotland is the true home of the red deer, and despite the premium on venison during the war, they are still numerous. Before the war, the average number of deer killed in the Highlands was about 13,000, which figure included both stags and hinds. During the first year of the war, this figure rose to over 23,000, and in recent years it has dropped to less than 10,000.

In the economy of the Highlands, red deer are thrice welcome They will eat almost anything that is edible. Frequently a Highland keeper or rabbit-trapper discovers his snared rabbits eaten in his snares by deer. Old and experienced deer will search for and eat grouse and curlew eggs.

Health-Giving Minerals

The red deer is classed as a grazing animal, but the line of demarcation between this and one of prey is not well defined. Not mere hunger alone makes them eat rabbits, or birds' eggs. They will also lick the bones of creatures which have perished on the hills; this is because they crave food containing health-giving minerals. Unfortunately, rock-salt is not always available, and when deer live near the sea, they obtain the precious salt by feeding on quantities of seaweed. They will even swim wide sounds to islands where fresh dulse and tangle abound. In dry weather, red deer drink copiously. When wading rivers, the animals often stop to drink; but normally their "drinking hour" is long before most of us are astir.

Edwin Landseer loved to paint the Highland red deer. One of his most famous pictures, "The Monarch of the Glen," is misnamed, says Dr. Fraser Darling, in his book, "A Herd of Red Deer." Apparently, the stag never leads; it is always the hind that does so.

An Unsolved Puzzle

The antlers of the deer remain one of the unsolved puzzles of natural history. True, deer use them when fighting, but stags without antlers, known as "hummels," are usually better fighters than those with them. Their primary purpose is to control the large harem of hinds, to attack rival stags, and to ward off would-be attackers such as dogs.

Undoubtedly antlers affect the physical condition of deer, for, living on soil usually deficient in lime, they are a heavy drain on their body resources. There are occasions when antlers seriously impede the deer's movements. The hind has no antlers. It is shorter and more lightly built than the male, rarely attaining the 14 stone or so which is the average weight of the stag. Stags of 20 or 30 stone have been known.

Red deer are aptly named, for their coats are mainly of a reddish-brown colour. Grey sometimes appears in them are white animals have been observed. When but an hour old, a red deer calf has no fear of humans. It will follow one about and is often difficult to shake off. When a deer calf is born, its mother leaves it lying flat out in its trampled heather bed. She stays away for some twelve hours, though all this time she will carefully watch the spot. It is during this period that the calf knows no fear. Yet after being fed by its mother for the first time, it becomes as wild as a hare.

At two years, the male calf starts to grow little knobs through the dark patch on the head. Eventually these develop into antlers which are made of bone and grow each year fram these knobs on the skull, forming in four or five months in spring and early summer. Legend has it that the stags shed their antlers on the same day each year.

Although deer have poor sight, their scent is superb and they can detect a man approaching from a mile distant under good wind conditions.

There are those who say that the days of the red deer are numbered. They overlook the fact that they are tough creatures, strong in wind, good runners and swimmers, and fine jumpers, clearing any fence under six feet high. These noble animals will, doubtless, hold their own for all time.

Death of a Craftsman

The death occured on August 27 of Mr. George R. Hamilton, of Woodlea Mount, Leeds, 11. Mr. Hamilton was one of the old craftsmen in the gun trade. He was apprenticed at Linsley Brothers, Leeds, and started work on April 5, 1899 at 2s 6d. per week, finishing after five years at 10s. per week.

Mr. Hamilton served in the first World War and was badly gassed. In 1919 he returned to Leeds and worked at Linsley Bros. as their head gunsmith for thirty-five years. He leaves a widow and two married daughters.

A fenland duck shooter out after a couple for the larder.

The Young Shot

Strength Through Unity

by Petrel

THE true wildfowler is often a "solitary" man. Against the backcloth of scudding clouds and stormy seas, with the shimmering glow of the moon mirrored in the smooth silence of the creeks as his footlights, he delivers his shooting soliloquy to a sleeping world and the smaller the audience, the better his performance. He had once no need of Equity, no union landowner demanded dues; his stage was the wide shoreline of these islands, where for half-a-sovereign anually he might wander at will amongst the mud, spartina grass, and sand of that windswept, cloud-wracked desert which lies between the sea-wall and the ebb. Jealous of their hard-won knowledge (which at times makes them appear aloof, even amongst their fellows) and proud to belong to a brotherhood pledged to the toughest, wildest sport of all, wildfowlers have always liked to preserve their independence as "lone wolves" of shooting, tied by no restrictions and beholden to no one. Freedom is the essence and ideal of their sport, but is there any room for the strictly free-lance fowler in the wildfowling world today?

Significant Constitution

When The Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland was first formed by a few enthusiasts long years ago, its aims and objects were the same as they are today, but I doubt whether those founder members ever realised how significant their Constitution would become in later years and to what great strength that small Association would grow. It was easy enough to join for a modest fee, but the membership was never great (a) because the number of wildfowlers was relatively small and (b) because only the keenest could be bothered, for the majority of shoreshooters took their "rights" for granted and seemingly secure in their independence fought shy of joining any organisation which they felt might restrict or publicise to others their own pet theories, shooting grounds or practices. The "isolationist" had all the shooting he wanted and hoped to keep it that way, while others with only a selfish cause at heart, saw in W.A. membership a chance to pick the brains of their fellows and joined simply for what they could get out of it.

Since the last war, we all know what has happened. The number of wildfowlers, potential and practised, has grown; shooting grounds have been swallowed up or spoiled by development and industry; and with its increasing popularity the spotlight has been turned on to a sport which, before, was never in the public eye. Inevitably, there was bound to be reaction from many different quarters in the name of science, protection, etc., and wildfowlers began to realise (though it has taken many of them an unconceivable time, and in some cases it is already too late), that in a powerful and active association lies the only hope of preventing the persistent "nibbling" at their sport from becoming a wholesome swallowing.

In reply to the "call to arms" from a reformed Wildfowlers' Association came the birth of wildfowling clubs all round the coast, and much of the threatened disaster was at least temporarily averted. But even today, with the thought of near-tragedy still fresh in the memory, there is always at the back of the mind of many wildfowlers the desire to cut loose from the organised body, to resume their individuality as lone wolves and leave the pack, and the danger remains that, believing themselves safe from outside attack, they will relapse into the former, fatal state of apathy.

Directing Operations

The parent body—The Wildfowlers Association of Great Britain and Ireland—represents all fowlers through affiliated clubs. It is the key centre which directs operations, the brain behind the movement, but no brain can function properly if the response of the limbs which it controls is sluggish or out of tune. Any success that their opponents have enjoyed has been due to the apathy of wildfowlers, and the mere formation and existence of a club in any coastal district is not enough. The club and its members are part of the great whole and in order that the whole may fulfil its functions properly, every part must be fully active and alive.

Most of our clubs are fortunate in possessing competent, lively secretaries and it is these worthies who have to bear the brunt of the considerable amount of work involved if the club is to run smoothly, at great personal expenditure of time and energy. Their only reward is that of knowing that they are backed by a flourishing organisation whose every member is doing his best to take an active interest in his clubs affairs thus lightening the secretary's burden.

And by an active interest we mean something more than the prompt payment of the annual club subscription. There is no room for the sleeping member, whose sole support takes the form of a cash contribution in return for which he expects to buy a guardian of his interests while he is left free to pursue his ideal of uninterrupted shooting where and when he pleases. If things go wrong, he will be the first to denounce the failure of his club officials in their duty, but how are they to guarantee to make the right decision every time without full representation at committee and general meetings?

Days That Are Passed

We should all like to do more shooting, and we should all like to return to those free and easy days when clubs were "non-political," but merely carefree gatherings of sportsmen sharing a common interest, and the free-lance fowler, if he did not wish to join, could go his lonely way in peace and offend no one. But those days, unhappily, are past and in these enlightened (?) times of stress it is only by all pulling our weight, and a little bit more besides that we can hope to defend what fowling we have left and the right to enjoy it in our own way. Let us cling to our ideal of lone-wolf shooting, certainly, but let us realise that to achieve it we are forced to protest and fight opposing factions every inch of the way and that only as a strong, united body can we succeed in the struggle. If anyone is so selfish as to sit back and leave the work to the other fellow, it will not be long before he is shaken out of his complacency to find that he has no fowling left at all.

When there is no longer any danger of an estuary being closed to shooting behind our backs, when the age-old rights of wildfowlers are re-established and their recommendations are given the recognition they deserve, then with clear consciences we can all relax and revert to free-lancing if we wish. Until that day dawns, we owe it to our sport and the hard working champions of our cause to do all in our power to support them in futherance of the notable successes which they have achieved in our name.

So next time you are asked to attend a committee or a general meeting, or some other call is made on your service, forget for the moment that you were going shooting, or fishing, and make the effort. Better to lose a day's fowling now than a season later on, and if that happens you will have plenty of time for other less important pursuits.

Round the Game Preserves

(Continued from page 627)

that includes the hundreds of sea birds that haunt the neighbourhood of the harbour. At the moment they all seem to be faring well. At least, the comparative wariness of the herring gulls is proof that they are getting sufficient food now, although the fish curers tell me that during the nesting time, when the weather was really bad, they were coming right into the fish houses for offal. And if the boxes of fish were left outside for a moment, they were pillaged.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Editor welcomes letters, and photographs relating to them, for this page. They should be as brief as possible, and the names and addresses of senders must be given, though these need not necessarily be published.

GROUSE SHOOTING

Sir,—I thought you would like a brief account from the moors. On this 4,000 acre moor last year, six of us, walking, killed 207 brace in the first nine days, with a limit of 250 which we got very early.

This year, in the first nine days, we have killed 160 brace, with a limit of 300, lowerable if it proved a poor season. This just about represents the difference on this particular moor between last season and this as the weather each year has been more or less perfect for shooting.

We have had no rain up here since August 10, except for one day with heavy showers, and a little rain at night. Birds are strong and there are very few cheepers. About 53 per cent are young. I cannot remember what the percentage was last year.

W.C.,
Ross-shire.

GAME PROSPECTS IN WEST SUSSEX

Sir,—Your readers may be interested in the enclosed recent photographs of some hand-reared pheasants on a West Sussex shoot. Most are pure-bred blacknecks, but a proportion are Mongolian and Chinese.

In spite of appalling weather conditions ever since the birds were hatched, they have done well, which reflects credit on the headkeeper, S. C. Shergold. When he feeds, three of last year's cock pheasants regularly join the party, together with 25 hand-reared English partridges. The latter make their presence felt by chasing the young pheasants round in a most masterful way, although only half their size and vastly out-numbered.

Reports on wild birds are conflicting, which is perhaps not surprising in view of the late harvest, but it is a comfort that some are optimistic, both in respect of pheasants and partridges.

F. G. STANDFIELD,
Chichester.

THE ASTONISHING MOOSE

Sir,—In the issue for May 28, you published an article entitled "The Astonishing Moose" by Mr. C. L. Marriner. This article was drawn to my attention since it tends to be somewhat misleading in so far as the habits and behaviour of moose in British Columbia are concerned. As you are probably aware, we have one of the largest stands of moose on the North American continent, and British Columbia is well known for its excellent moose hunting.

Is it possible that the moose has been confused with the mountain caribou in the following statement; "a vast herd of moose comes into view and starts to move, ant-like, across the floor of the basin grazing leisurely." Although moose are gregarious to a degree, I have never heard of a vast herd giving the impression of ant-like movement. Its description would seem to fit caribou better than it would moose.

Likewise, the description of the attack on the moose herd, presumably by native Indians may be true for some parts of the North-West Territories, but it certainly does not apply to British Columbia where moose numbers are high and the annual legal harvest amounts to over 5,000 animals.

Moose hunting is usually a matter of stalking out a solitary animal, or at the most a small group and it is a little astonishing to read of a "scene of terrible carnage." Possibly this has occurred, but certainly not on a regular basis in Western Canada, to my knowledge.

Rather misleading is the statement that, "so relentless is the pursuing moose that the one chance for the horseman caught in such a predicament is to break the rhythm of its action. Only if the moose can be reduced to a laboured lope may the rider and his mount even hope to escape being slashed to ribbons by its sharp front feet." This statement is definitely misleading, since only upon rare occasions will a bull moose charge and even then it is most unlikely that it would press home the charge, or pursue to any distance a mounted hunter. Our men who have tagged calf moose have been charged upon occasion by the irate mother of the calf, but there is very little that can be said to be relentless about the attack.

The ferocity of the moose is far overrated, they may best be described as timid animals, only too ready to get out of man's way. Only in the occasional instance, when an animal is wounded or harassed, or when hungry in midwinter, will it attack a human being.

Perhaps the above statements can be put down to "writer's licence," but to us in British Columbia they are a bit astonishing. Credit should go to the writer for an accurate account of the environment in which the animals live, even if the moose does not "smell out its enemies with incredible accuracy."

J. HATTER,
(Chief Game Biologist, British Columbia Game Commission),
567 Burrard Street, Vancouver, 1, B.C.

BIHAR GOOSE SHOOT

Sir,—Regarding the description of my goose shoot in Bihar (issue August 13), perhaps Mr. Bill Powell is not one who has a keen wife, who enjoys the sport of an early morning goose shoot in the plains of India. I imagine he has not been out east, or he would know, as soon as the sun get well up, that most Europeans must wear topees which they would not be wearing before the sun rose.

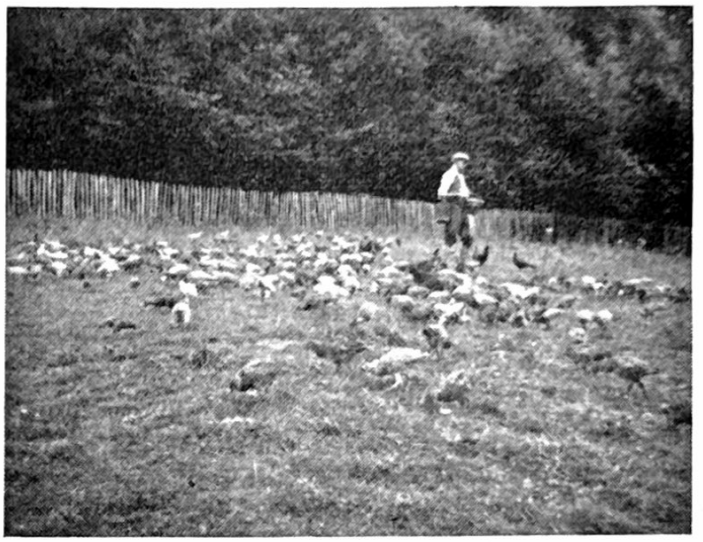
Unless he wished to disappear in a quicksand, he would not go to his pit without a torch, as the path, which has flags on both sides over the sand to the pit is very narrow. Unless he did not mind being drowned in an Indian downpour, he would also take his mackintosh as the pits were miles away from any growth of any kind. Certainly if he had 14 or 15 guests who had come some of them many miles, leaving at midnight, he would be a poor host if he did not arrange for them to get a cup of tea and a sandwich, as they would not get home much before mid-day.

He also talks of "hand-fed geese." He cannot have any idea of the circumstances. I did not in my article write of the hard work entailed to get the geese collected to the spot decided on for the shoot. They had to be drawn from very many miles of river and well guarded from poaching, guns, and fish eagles, when successfully got there.

Nor did I lie on a campbed with a fan over me, or an umbrella; whilst I sat in the sun of the Indian plains where you could see nothing but sand for miles around from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. whilst I superintended the digging and camouflaging one of the eight pits.

Wildfowling, as I know it, is generally done on the sea-shore, or near it. My goose shoots were many hundreds of miles from any sea—nearer the hills of Nepal than the sea! Anyway, they have given many happy hours of shooting to many sportsmen.

F. A. C. MUNNS,
Etchinghill, Folkestone.



Hand-reared birds gather round at feeding time, including a last year's cock and hen, seen close to the keeper. On the opposite page . . . . .

MYXOMATOSIS

Sir,—Until recently, myxomatosis was just something remote to us in this corner of Durham, once renowned for its wildfowling and rough shooting. Now, with dramatic and horrifying suddenness, it is here. In the whins and hedgebacks the putrid, shambling effigies of once wholesome animals are dying, and the disease is spreading, and I am awaiting, with trepidation, its arrival on a certain shoot fifteen miles away.

Diverging from the topic, and as a spur to those shoot-less contributors who lament their circumstances, this shoot was obtained when the old farm which I rented, and which held hardly a rabbit, was sold up. Evidently my conduct over the years I had it was held in some esteem, for the farmer "found" this new shoot for me and proved that if you make a friend of a farmer he will help you.

Myxomatosis was introduced by importations from Sussex, but the astonishing part of the foul business (which has received much publicity in the local Press and the possibility of police action) is that the culprit farms only fifty odd acres, and he has hardly a rabbit on it! What he did was to trespass on neighbouring land where rabbits are tolerated by sport-loving farmers, and proceed, with a dead rabbit on a pole, to foul as many holes and "seats" as possible. He has admitted the offence to local Pressmen.

Let us hope that our hard north-east winters will retard the disease, for a weekly paper states that in Scotland myxomatosis has failed. Could one of your Scottish contributors verify this? It would be some consolation to know if the report is true.

NORTH-EASTER,
Co. Durham.

Sir,—"Tower-Bird" certainly knows his "drummers" and, I suspect, not a little about myxomatosis. I am with him all the way in his forthright campaign against this foul disease, but apart from the cruelty aspect, I must agree with him that the shooter has little to worry about, taking the long view, with regard to his rabbit shooting. In my opinion an injection of serum in perhaps a number of unaffected rabbits, although perhaps an excellent idea, and also quite practicable, is really unnecessary.

Over a number of years, on a shoot of which I was a member, late winter and early spring rains would cause a number of first-litter rabbits to be found dead, and on being paunched these would show a discoloured and swollen liver (coccidiosis). In the autumn of that year, rabbits would be hard to come by. But what a different story in the following two or three seasons! Plenty of rabbits, and what is more, healthy and in good condition. I noticed that this early mortality occured about every fifth year, and I like to think that this was nature's way of keeping the balance, within her intricate and varied family.

No! I shall not "raffle" my guns yet, because I have a certain conviction that I shall enjoy many a good rabbit in the years to come.

J. G. GARETH,
Knowle, Bristol.

SAFETY-CATCHES

Sir,—In view of the interest shown recently on this page in the efficiency of safety-catches, may I draw the attention of readers to the automatic safety-catch which I have recently patented. There have been an appalling number of accidents reported in the Press recently, to say nothing of minor accidents which are not publicised. In all cases, so far as I can remember, the tragedy has been caused by accidental discharge of the gun.

The automatic safety-catch which I have fitted to my own gun reduces the possibility of accidental discharge to negligible properties, and can, therefore, make a tremendous contribution towards the elimination of accidents. The normal safety-catch is retained and works in the usual way, in that with the catch on "safe" the gun cannot be fired; even when the catch is pushed forward the gun can be carried in perfect safety as it still cannot be fired until pressure is applied to the butt-plate, as is the case when the gun is brought to the shoulder in the action of taking a shot.

It is possible to envisage circum-

stances in which an accident could occur even with this type of safety-catch, i.e., as one correspondent pointed out, no safety-catch is the complete answer and it must always be remembered that the gun is a lethal weapon. This is, of course, quite true, but if it is intended as a criticism of a safety device then it is a particularly thoughtless and meaningless comment. Surely it is obvious that if a simple and inexpensive safety device would be a means of saving human life, then the question of its exact degree of efficiency is relatively unimportant. In other words, if nine out of ten potential accidents were prevented by an automatic safety-catch it is absurd to condemn the device on account of the one accident that it failed to prevent.

In view of "Petrel's" excellent and timely remarks on accidents in a recent article, perhaps he would like to comment on my device. I should be glad to let him have any further particulars necessary, if he feels inclined to agree to my suggestion.

T. H. GOTT,
Greengates, Bradford.

[If you care to write to "Petrel," c/o this office, we will forward your letter to him.—Ed.]

Sir,—I have read with interest the letters of Mr. J. C. Gow and Mr. C. F. Miles. Mr. Gow in commenting on the safety-catches on pistols has, I believe, in mind special interceptors, which, even if the hammer falls, prevents the actuation of the firing pin to discharge the cartridge—the Walther is an example.

On sporting guns, grip safeties are, of course, known, I have one myself on an old Blisset hammer gun. These, I believe, only lock the trigger-action and do not prevent the hammer from shaking or being dislodged from its engagement in the sear mechanism, and striking the firing pin with sometimes disastrous results.

I think it would be generally true to say that the safety-catch on a modern sporting gun is misnamed.

H. E. PRICE,
Solihull, Warwickshire.

Sir,—Mr. J. C. Gow wonders why a robust device, passed by both British and U.S.A. services, is not used on guns and rifles. This has puzzled me, too, particularly after I saw a friend escape a shattering death, thanks alone to this gadget. I have been very friendly and in close touch during the past 40 years with many of our leading gunmakers most of whom have, alas, passed away. Not one of them has given me advice on this subject. None seemed interested. Of course, it is improbable that they had witnessed what I had. The main impression seemed to be that, as there was no demand, there was no profit, and only chance of a loss over the sale of a gun so fitted. Naturally demand is not encouraged and advice is lacking in regard to life saving possibilities.

Our daily Press does not seem to realise that accidental discharges—not deliberately fired, reckless shots—can be almost abolished. My keenness on this life saving extra safety is due solely to witnessing an escape from death thanks to one, and plenty of other cases one reads of where mechanism would have made a tragic end impossible.

M. L. WILKINS,
Long Acre, Church Crookham, Hants.

a close-up of poults busy on the feed. (See letter, "Game Prospects in West Sussex.")

BINOCULARS FOR FOWLING

Sir,—Your contributor D.B.B., in his article "Wildfowling Wisdom" (issue September 3) deals with the choice of binoculars for wildfowling. With much of what he writes there can only be complete agreement but, "the higher the magnification the better" needs qualification. A good 10x is far better than a cheap 20x. In any case, as the magnification is increased, the light value and, usually, the field of view, are decreased for the same diameter objective. Thus a typical 10x50 has a light value of 25 and a field of about 115 yards at 1,000; whereas a 20x50 has a light value of 6¼ and a field of about 50. The former has four times the light value and could be used long after it was too dark for the 20x. It must also be remembered that the high powers not only magnify the size of the object but the natural shake of one's hands.

In my opinion quality of definition, reasonably high light value and decent field of view are far more important than sheer magnification.

It is also not quite correct to assume that width of field is dependent upon diameter of objective. A 7x50 sometimes does give a wider field than 7x25 but not necessarily so. What it does give is four times higher light value.

J. R. HEBDITCH. F.S.M.C., F.B.O.A.
Doncaster.

FRUIT-EATING DOGS

Sir,—Regarding Mr. Moxon's remarks on the above. My own dog picks gooseberries, raspberries, strawberries, and windfall apples.

In the house, he shows a fondness for bananas, the soft parts of oranges and grapefruit; the skins of apples, plums, etc., and will crack nuts and devour the kernels.

G. H. SMITH,
Oxford.

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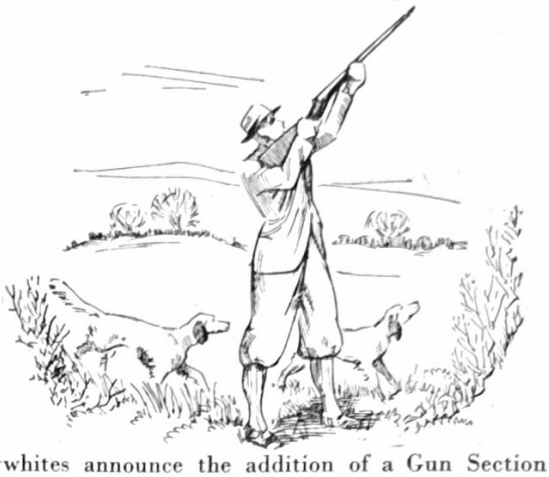

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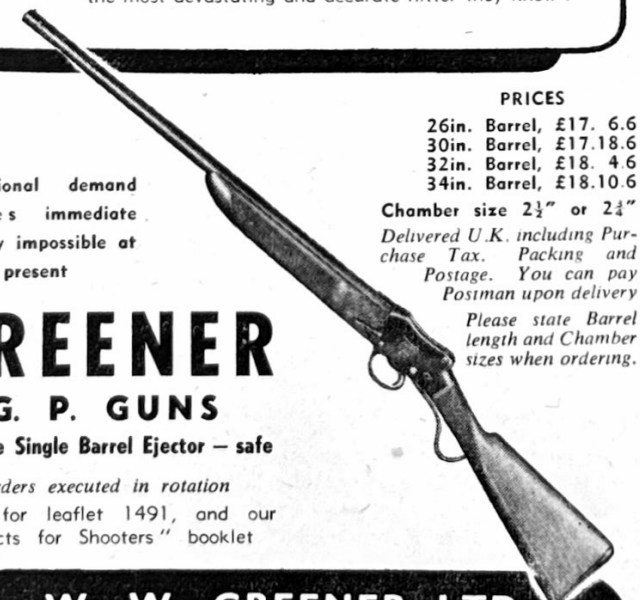

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Gundog News

Conducted by P. R. A. MOXON, Herne Common, Herne Bay, Kent

IT is not often that I am persuaded to venture near industry. Tall chimneys, noisy machinery, and the flurry and scurry of factory life has a horror for me—a mere countryman to whom even a day in a big town is a veritable purgatory. It was with some misgivings, therefore, that I accepted an invitation recently to inspect the factory of Messrs. Chappie Ltd., the well known canners of dog and cat foods. The fact that the works is situated in Melton Mowbray, in the heart of beautiful sporting country, may have had something to do with my decision to go and see for myself how Chappie, Lassie, and Kit-E-Kat are made. If I ever doubted whether I should be interested, those doubts were dispelled within a few minutes of entering the factory offices.

Here I was met by Dr. Gordon Booth, the research director, and before we had been talking five minutes I realised that the canning of animal foods is not a question of mixing up a mess of poor meat and fish and flinging it into a tin as quickly as possible, but a highly skilled and extremely technical process carried out only after the most exhaustive laboratory tests and conducted with a regard for hygiene which would put many human consumption factories to shame. Not only is every batch of the mixing tested in the laboratory by skilled scientists, but a vast amount of research work is carried out in the field by highly trained researchers.

Different formulas, or mixings, are tested out in the homes of ordinary dog and cat owners throughout the country. Not just a few homes are visited, but thousands, and one of the tests is to discover if the dog or cat prefers the original formula to the experimental one. A bowl of each product is placed before the animal at its normal feeding time, and the owner is asked to record which product was sniffed first, which was tasted first, which was eaten and obviously enjoyed. In this way the research workers are able to make recommendations to the laboratories and enable them to produce acceptable and nourishing animal foods, which, when mixed with scraps, forms a balanced diet for dog or cat, as the case may be.

Many prefer to kennel their dogs in large batches.

Conducted Tour

My actual tour of the factory was conducted by the Works Manager, Mr. Scammell, who is nothing if not enthusiastic about his job, and whose explanation of the different processes involved in the manufacture of the foods was so interesting that my tour took about an hour longer than is customary. Employing about 700 workers and working 24 hours a day on four shifts, the whole factory has about it an air of efficiency and hygiene which astounded me.

I was asked to don a white coat before starting the tour, and every worker is garbed in white no matter what his job. This has a psychological reason, for not only does it look cleaner but a man is naturally more concerned if he makes white clothing dirty, hence the tendency is to keep as clean as possible. Workers can change their clothing whenever they like, and the firm runs its own laundry so that clean white coats or overalls are in constant supply.

As readers will be primarily interested in dog foods, they will be interested to learn that the main ingredients of Chappie consist of wholesome whale meat, good (really good) fresh herrings or white fish, first quality cut wheat, and condensed whey. The meat and fish are fed into separate machines which mince them up, and bins of the mince are passed on to an operator who weighs out the correct proportions of each, adds the necessary amount of cut wheat and condensed whey. The whole mixing then goes into a vast mixer, from when it proceeds into an ingenious machine which fills the cans. The cans pass on a moving belt to the capping machines, which attach and seal the lid.

Efficiency and Hygiene

The cans are loaded into huge wire baskets, and then go into sterilisers looking like enormous pressure cookers. Here they are sterilised at a temperature of 260° F. for 35 minutes in the case of small cans and 55 minutes for large ones. After cooling, the cans are loaded into the labelling machines, from whence they proceed by conveyor belt to the packing machine which fills them into cardboard boxes. The packed boxes then go through another machine which seals them down, and finally they are mechanically stacked into waiting transport for distribution.

From beginning to end the process is one of efficiency and hygiene. Noise and odour are reduced to a minimum, and the workers appear happy and contented. Well they should be, for the firm sports its own canteen, pays a generous wage (average £11 a week), and has a system of welfare and personal contact between management and worker which might well be copied by other factories.

The laboratories (where even the water used is daily tested and chlorinated) conduct tests on all the ingredients before they are used to make animal foods, and are constantly devising new processes and formulas. The workshops make most of the complicated machinery used in the canning process and maintain everything from the boiler rooms to the capping machines. When it is realised that Chappie Ltd. turn out no fewer than three and a half *million* tins of animal foods per week it is obvious that all machinery must be in first rate working order.

At the completion of my tour, I was given interesting statistical data by Dr. Cotton, who is in charge of this department. Exhaustive consumer research, involving personal interviews and questionaires completed by dog and cat owners throughout the country, prove that 41 per cent of dog owners make use of canned dog foods. The average amount spent on food for a dog is four shillings and five pence a week, more in the towns and less in the country areas. In the manufacture of Chappie, Lassie and Kit-E-Kat about 40 tons of whale meat, 120 tons of fish (white and herrings) and 15 tons of wheat are used each day. Lassie contains no fish—Chappie has a proportion of fish, and as cats are found to favour liver above all else, Kit-E-Kat contains a high proportion of it. The fact that the products are in daily use throughout the country show that Messrs. Chappie Ltd. have countless feline and canine consumers who offer "proof of the pudding . . ."

Dog Training Establishments

During my brief "busman's holiday" I called at several of the leading gundog training establishments in the eastern counties and the midlands. All my professional colleagues seem to be full up with dogs undergoing training, and the general opinion is that the dog trade is booming. The demand for trained dogs is as high as ever, and as yet the spread of myxomatosis does not seem to have interfered with spaniel sales or training. I was shown some very promising dogs—spaniels and retrievers—and one or two of the kennels have some dark horses up their sleeves for the trial season. I remember predicting that Treveilyr Swift would get to the top at trials long before he was ever run, and I wrote of him without mentioning names in these pages.

My friend Andrew Wylie has another good one for the coming season, whilst his brother Jim showed me a springer and a cocker spaniel which were most impressive. I understand that all three will be competing if all goes well. The Wylies have a lovely situation for training dogs, with a natural water test ready to hand, and being situated near Newmarket in the heart of some of the best shooting in the country they have everything in their favour.

Another old friend, Gilbert Vinall, near Ipswich, showed me a very impressive labrador dog which, like so many of the good ones, made a very poor start. So much so that this dog was considered too nervous and

highly-strung for training, and was kept on the shelf until over eighteen months old, when suddenly it bucked up its ideas and now looks like being a stormer. Both sire and dam have made names for themselves at trials, and I shall be surprised indeed if this dog does not perform with distinction in public, given the opportunities.

The Chudley brothers, Jack and Keith, whose kennels are near Kettering, look like continuing their recent run of success if the dogs I saw at work there are anything to judge by. Here again I am asked not to mention names, but I saw two labradors and a springer and a cocker which will give all comers a run for their money. It was very interesting to watch Jack and Keith working spaniels in their rabbit pen together, much as they would if down at the same time under the judges at a trial. The dogs I saw were under perfect control and hunted with pace and style, and I was impressed by the quiet and efficient methods by which they were handled.

There is one thing that all our leading gundog trainers seem to have in common, no matter how much their methods may vary, and this is to welcome a colleague and entertain him hospitably. Not only this, but they are willing to show you the best and the worst dogs their kennels contain, and to be unstinting with advice and tips on training.

As I mentioned above, methods of gundog training vary from trainer to trainer, and though the basic principles remain the same, it is always interesting to make comparisons. Another interesting fact which emerges is that although many methods may be completely opposed, the results often seem to be the same, and the trainers produce good dogs and make names for themselves and their patrons at field trials. Methods of kenneling and management vary considerably as well, but this is often due to necessity and the consideration of having to adapt existing buildings and layout to requirements.

Variety of Kennels

Some trainers favour small kennels and runs, others like to give their pupils unlimited room. Most men kennel two or three dogs together in one kennel and run, but others prefer to keep them in big batches of up to eight or ten. Ideas about exercise vary considerably. Some men make free running exercise a fetish, others believe that the exercise period should also be the training period as well. The dogs then come out of kennel fresher and keener for work than they would do if they had had a lot of previous dashing about. We are all agreed, of course, that exercise in some shape or form is vitally necessary for the health and wellbeing of a dog. It is in the application of exercise that most variation is shown.

These days gundogs are expected to perform their work at the double, and during a twenty minute training spell the average spaniel or retriever will cover a lot of ground and give itself a good deal of exercise. Spaniels working in punishing cover exercise muscles and lungs, as do retrievers carrying out long retrieves. There is little danger of the average gundog getting too much exercise, even when in full work, but I have been told on good authority that sheepdogs on the Scottish and Welsh hills are estimated to cover about 75 miles a day. This is computed on the assumption that most shepherds on the hills walk 25 miles a day and their dogs cover at least three times as much ground. Sheepdogs have a useful life of only eight years on average, and then mostly just fade out and die. Insufficient diet is given as one of the main reasons, and my informant told me that many sheepdogs only receive meat at lambing time, when they help themselves to placentas from the lambs.

In the main, the average sheepdog is fed on maize, biscuits, or oatmeal, plus what it can scrounge or find lying about. The gundog, on the other hand, receives an ample diet, and though this varies from owner to owner and from kennel to kennel, one seldom sees a working gundog out of condition. In many cases our retrievers and spaniels are at their best between the ages of four and six, and countless dogs lead an active working life until they are ten years of age. Breeding, rearing, diet and exercise all have an important bearing on the life span of the dog, and that it pays to look after a good friend and valuable sporting companion is obvious to the gundog owner.

It may be ignorance or purely lack of facilities that cause shepherds to have so little regard for the welfare of their dogs. I cannot believe that it is simply callousness and, of course, one cannot accuse every shepherd of failing to feed his dog properly. Many sheepdogs are in top condition, and those belonging to the leading sheep-dog trial competitors seldom lack condition.

Hot Competition at Trials

This coming field trial season will see some hot competition, and I have been glad to notice of recent years that increasing attention is paid to work in thick cover by trainers of retrievers. I have long held the view that a gundog is not a gundog as the shooting man understands the term if it "dries up" directly it is asked to work in brambles and other thick cover. In the past many dogs have won reputations and even become Field Trial Champions by winning at trials in the eastern counties where most of the game is walked up and nothing more punishing than long stubble is encountered.

Some men have spoken of their dogs as being "good in cover" when what they really meant was that it could find birds in kale and roots. That it behoves any trainer of a field trial dog to accustom it to work in all types of cover should be obvious, for you seldom know before the season the type of ground different trials are to be held on. Although it may have been the custom in the past for certain handlers to pick their ground very carefully before entering their dog, the leading professional handlers seldom if ever come out with a dog which is not just as at home in brambles and water as it is on stubble and kale. Certain strains of retriever are known for their dislike of punishing cover, but this is gradually being bred out by selective breeding and through paying more attention to early work in the thick.

Several dogs have slipped up badly in the past at the few field trials held in my own county of Kent. Here there is very little walking-up done, and nearly all our trials are held on pheasant shoots where though the birds may not be long ones, the retrievers do have to face punishing cover. It may be said that a trial is not a trial unless the dogs are tested both at stands and walking up, but I also maintain that it is not a trial unless all dogs are made to prove themselves in really punishing brambles and bracken and similar stuff. One owner remarked to me a year or two ago that he would never have brought his dog to Kent if he had known that there would be no walking-up. What he might have more truthfully said was that he would have stopped away had he known his dog would be called upon to face stuff which our dogs have to work in daily during the season.

Birds in the open on stubble and grass can be difficult and require a good nose of a dog. They may also test a dog's ability to be handled over long distances. But surely the pheasant shooter in most parts of these Isles requires, above all else, a dog which he can put into a wood thick with brambles and scrub, and work it throughout the day without any flagging. Dogs like this have to be trusted—if they riot out-of-sight you can do nothing about it. From the trial point of view this may be helpful, for the judges probably cannot see what the dog is doing, anyway.

What is required is a dog which can be put into the thick behind or in front of the good, and be relied upon to return with bird after bird until all those shot have been accounted for. A good strong running cock pheasant in covert will test a dog for nose and control more than any other bird, especially if there is plenty of game and rabbits about. This is the dog which the average shooting man longs to own.

Field Trials

Scottish field trial season got under way on August 10, when the twenty-sixth pointer and setter trials of the Scottish Field Trials Association started at Doune Lodge, Doune, Perthshire. Winner of the All-aged Stake was Mr. J. Arthur Rank's Scotney Don. Mr. M. G. Christie's Hoyden of Abbot's End was second, with Hon. Mrs. E. V. Eden's Wanderer of Cromlix third. Reserve and certificate of merit went to Captain W. Parlour's Sharnberry Nita. Other certificates of merit were awarded to Hon. Mrs. E. V. Eden's Hope of Cromlix, Mr. J. Arthur Rank's Scotney Yvette, and Mrs. F. Nagle's and Miss M. Clark's Sulhamstead Bing D'Or.

On the second day the Puppy and Non-winners' Stake was run off, the winner being Captain F. H. D. Courteney's Segontium Pearlie, with Mr. M. G. Christie's Quail of Abbot's End second, the Hon. Mrs. E. V. Eden's Betty of Cromlix third.

The following day the party moved over to Mrs. Eden's ground for the Championship Stake, which was won by Captain F. H. D. Courteney's Lorfred Billhill Vivienne. Second was Captain Parlour's Sharnberry Whiteston, and third the Hon. Mrs. Eden's Wanderer of Cromlix. Reserve and certificate of merit went to Mr. J. Arthur Rank's Scotney Dale. Certificates of merit were awarded Mr. J. Arthur Rank's Scotney Del and Scotney Philip. Captain Courtney's Segontium Pearlie, Mrs. Nagle's and Miss Clark's Sulhamstead Basil D'Or, and Sulhamstead Bey D'Or, and Mr. Alan Roberts' Segontium Wisci.

On August 18, the Labrador Club of Scotland held their Amateur Handler's Stake over the same ground at Cromlix, when in a marathon trial which was held on walked-up grouse, and which did not end until well after tea time, the honours went to an Irish dog, Mrs. Tenison's year old dog, Ballyfrema Bob, who is by Ch. Donnybrook Thunder out of Pamel of Darver, and who was handled in capable fashion by his lady owner. Second was Mrs. Purbrick's Strattonley Shot, a bitch handled by her owner, and third Mrs. M. Galbraith's Torwoodhouse Simon, also handled by his owner. Quite a day for the ladies. Reserve and Certificate of Merit went to Mr. J. M. Manson's Gold Warden of Glengour, handled by Mr. R. Baglow. Other certificates of merit were awarded Mr. Alexander's Gail of Blaircourt, Mrs. E. Taylor's Wildwins Glenmohr, and Mr. D. McKenzie's Murrayville Everlasting.

Wildfowling Clubs

On August 28 The Kent Wildfowlers' Association held its first annual general meeting at The Shakespeare Hotel, Canterbury Road, Sittingbourne. There was a very good attendance of members, and the meeting had more than the formal business to maintain the interest of all present.

The chair was occupied by the Association's president, Mr. F. A. Burden, MP for Gillingham, who did so much in the House of Commons to safeguard the interests of wildfowlers in relation to the Protection of Birds Act, 1954. Mr. Burden expressed his pleasure at being able to preside at the meeting and promised his continued support of the Association. During the course of the meeting, he stressed the need to maintain and increase the numbers of wildfowl. He also promised his help if required in connection with pigeon shoots organised through the N.F.U.

The chairman, Mr. D. Ashenden, spoke of the tremendous amount of work which had been put in by the officials of the Association during the past year, mainly in connection with the Protection of Birds Bill. The membership of the Association had grown three-fold since the first meeting in September last year, and it was the aim to get as many wildfowlers as possible to join. Although wildfowling is a lone sport, the interests of wildfowlers could be protected only by action as a body.

The Association showed a satisfactory balance in hand, despite the heavy expenses of the first year's work. The following officials were elected for the ensuing year : President, Mr. F. A. Burden, M.P. ; Vice-President, Messrs. T. Gregory, J. H. Fraser, J. W. S. Mount and F. A. C. Munns ; Chairman : Mr. D. Ashenden ; Hon. Secretary, Mr. D. L. Brown ; Hon. Treasurer, Mr. R. Rapson ; Committee, Dr. J. G. Harrison and Messrs. R. W. Archer, A. W. L. Franklin, A. S. Matthews, E. N. Pearce, D. G. Samson, N. A. Stokes and N. Thompson.

Following the business of the meeting, Mr. E. L. Parish, O.B.E., chairman of The Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland, spoke on a number of matters of immediate interest to wildfowlers. He urged the need for representation of wildfowlers' views to County Councils and for support of The British Field Sports Society. He then went on to speak of The Nature Conservancy and The Wildfowl Trust. Concern was expressed over the procedure leading up to the establishment of the sanctuary at Bridgwater Bay in Somerset and the president undertook to raise this matter elsewhere. In speaking of The Wildfowl Trust, Mr. Parish explained the difficulties at present in the way of co-operation, and said that associations must give this matter very careful thought. The meeting closed with the showing of a coloured film of shots taken on the grounds of The Wildfowl Trust.

Clay Pigeon Shooting

FIXTURE LIST

Sept. 11 : Blackpool G.C., Greenhalgh, Kirkham, Lancs. Open & Members' Shoot.

Sept. 11 : Hayfield G.C., Nr. Stockport. Members' Shoot.

Sept. 12 : Royal Oak C.P. Club, Cowfold, Sussex. Open Shoot, 10.30 a.m.

Sept. 12 : Munster Skeet Championship, Adare. Irish C.P.S.A.

Sept. 16 : Colchester G.C., Essex. Members' Shoot, 2.30 p.m.

Sept. 18 : Leicester and Dist. G.C. Open Shoot.

Sept. 19 : Royal Oak C.P. Club, Cowfold, Sussex. 10.30 a.m.

Sept. 22 : Gloucester C.P. Club. Members' Shoot. 6 p.m.

* * *

Reports and Results

The Waltham Abbey Gun Club held their final meeting of the season at their Honey Lane ground. Owing to the bad weather, shooting was far from pleasant ; nevertheless, some good scores were put up by most of the members, and everyone present was pleased to see Mr. Grant Fiske break his first possible at skeet. This feat was "unique," as he has been a leading competitor in the Eastern Counties for the last two seasons and a possible has eluded until now.

The weekly winners were as follows. Schulze Cup : 1st, J. Kalsey ; 2, D. Purcell. Club Cup : 1st, J. Kidwill ; 2nd, J. Halsey. Mrs. Tucks Cup : 1st, B. Walker ; 2nd, R. T. Akers. After several tie shoots for the cups the prizes were presented by Mrs. Bedford.

On behalf of the committee, the secretary thanked all the members for their support during the season, and personally thanked Mr. Andrew for his valuable help in running the meetings. Mr. Bass (the father of the Club) then took command and announced the following prizewinners : Schultze Cup : 1st, G. E. Tuck ; 2nd, H. McClain. Club Cup : 1st, L. G. Butters ; 2, H. McClain. Mrs. E. Tucks Cup : 1st, H. E. McClain ; 2nd, E. Walker. American Skeet : W. G. Fiske. Ladies Cup : 1st, Mrs. J. Baxter ; 2nd, Mrs. J. Kidwill ; 3rd, Mrs. N. Johnson.

The Committee thank the following for gifts of prizes : Mr. D. Bedford (shooting stick and cartridge bag), Mr. C. B. Bass (cut glass hors d'ouvres set on silver stand), Mrs. G. E. Tuck (ladies cup), Mrs. J. Kidwill (six pigeon decoys).

Mrs. Bedford was presented with a bouquet by Miss Elizabeth Tuck. The Club President, Mr. Donald Bedford, then replied on behalf of his wife. He first complimented the committee on the progress in 1954 of the Club in general, and went on to say how well the Club team had shot at the various meetings throughout the season, having won four team prizes out of a possible six. He remarked on the high standard of shooting by Messrs. McClain, B. Walker, W. G. Fiske and D. Hare (twice) in making possibles and winning their skeet 20 badges during the year.

* * *

West Pinchbeck Gun Club. The Lincolnshire Open and Residential Championship (skeet 40 bird) was held on one of our best days this summer, and was well attended by 35 guns. The winners were as follows :

Open Lincs. Championship : 1st, Mr. M. Freeman ; he holds the A. Pratt Trophy and also I.C.I. Shield and Medal for 1954 ; second, Mr. E. L. Nichols ; 3rd, A. Allbrighton. The Novice Shield was again won by Mr. F. G. Martin for the second year. Pools shared (£38 4s. in all) : Down-the-line (10 birds) A. Pratt, C. Johnson, J. Sutcliff, F. Lunn, G. Freeman, G. Lester and I. Fradley. Five pair Skeet : R. D. Purcell, G. Freeman, M. Freeman, A. Allbrighton, A. Pratt. Five pairs Double Rise : 1st, Mr. M. Freeman ; 2nd, J. Sutcliff. Five birds Novice : 1st,, Mr. Carter ; 2nd, shared, Giddins and Glover.

Count Your Blessings

(Continued from page 629)

venison, and as I ate I did not remember the shy, graceful creature of the woods, but merely pondered on the just retribution meeted out to a cunning raider the depredations of which well merited its fate.

The snow melts, and the warm spring sunshine is hastened by the flying weeks into the blazing heat of June, but one blessing remains, for am I not being rowed to the foot of our lovely red Devon cliffs, there to sit behind the black rocks, with their smell of salt and sea-weed, to await the cormorants, as they sweep in to their roosting ledges high up the cliff face? This is sport of the most contemplative kind, only a field of rippling, waving corn reflecting the fire of an August sunset and the duck gliding in out of a glowing and fading sky, can compare with this beautiful setting, making it a sport for the gods.

Here I shall sit, and smoke, and dream of past joys. I shall sit and listen to the rhythmic murmur and splash of the gentle tide, lapping and pebble-scraping at my feet. I shall watch the gulls as they wheel and swoop in white confusion against the blue sky, but I shall not heed their screaming resentment at my presence, for soon I shall shade my eyes, and see far out over the sparkling water the tiny dot heralding the approach of the first of my birds. No time for dreaming now, for already I can distinguish the long neck, and swift-beating wings. Here it comes, gaining height rapidly as it swings in further down, and continues its journey high up and close to the cliff-face. It is nearly over now, and I see its head twisted sideways peering with puzzled stare at the empty ledges. I give it a good lead and press the trigger and watch apprehensively the hurtling, whistling body crash on to the rocks and pebbles a yard from where I sit.

So it shall go on, and as the shadows lengthen my birds shall stream in quick succession to attempt the perilous landings, and my shoulder, covered only by a thin shirt, will bruise and redden as mute witness of my sport. Soon the sun, which has scorched and burned my face, will be slipping beneath the far horizon leaving only the gloom that preceeds night, then I shall sit back in the boat and listen to the creak and rattle of oars in rowlocks, and feel the scent-laden evening breeze refreshing and cooling my weary limbs. As we move with slow-measured surge through the star-gleaming water, I shall think of my friend's wistful envy, and looking back on this day, shall smile and be content.

Macedonian Memories

(Continued from page 631)

the lines of hog hunting, but with polo sticks instead of spears. There was some talk years ago of the Greek Government draining the land, which could easily be done by making a proper and permanent channel for the last mile or two of the Galiko. Being so close to Salonika the land would have been very valuable, but I doubt if it has ever been undertaken.

The Lake Copais Company, a vast agricultural estate recently nationalised by the Greek Government, was started by Englishmen after the war ended, and they bought their first horses and mules from me when we were selling off surplus army animals in the spring of 1919. These sales were rather amusing at first, for the local buyers, Turks, Greeks, Jews, Armenians and hybrids thereof, used to arrive with fat bundles of drachmae notes to "grease the palms" of the selling officers, and for a long while simply could not understand our attitude in refusing baksheesh.

Death of Stanley Duncan

(Continued from page 624)

man, always willing to advise and help fellow wildfowlers, and it was this natural desire that made his efforts as secretary of The Wildfowlers' Association a life work. He always championed the cause of the poor man's shooting to great effect. He corresponded with wildfowlers in many lands, and by his *nom de plume* was known to a very wide circle of admirers who read his extensive writings published in sporting journals over the past 50 years.

Thomas Elliot Wang Duncan, the gifted engineer and wildfowler, was laid to rest at Anlaby, near the Humber he loved so much, on September 2, 1954.

Forthcoming Field Trials

SECRETARIES OF FIELD TRIAL SOCIETIES ARE INVITED TO SEND US REPORTS OF THEIR TRIALS FOR PUBLICATION IN "THE SHOOTING TIMES." REPORTS SHOULD BE SENT DIRECT TO THE KENNEL EDITOR, MR. P. R. A. MOXON, HERNE COMMON, HERNE BAY, KENT.

Sept. 21 & 22 : Cocker Spaniel Club. (Barcloy, Castle Douglas.) Secretary : H. S. Lloyd, Swakeleys Farm House, Ickenham, Middlesex.

Sept. 22 & 23 : English Springer Spaniel Club of Northern Ireland. (Open Stake.) Secretary : H. A. Wilson, The Hill, Moss Road, Lambeg, Co. Antrim.

Sept. 23 : Scottish Field Trials Association. (Cockers.) (Open Stake.) Kirkcudbrightshire. Judges : Mr. H. S. Lloyd and Lady Belhaven. Secretary : Lt.-Col. L. M. Kerr, Tullich Lodge, Middlebie, by Lockerbie, Dumfries.

Sept. 24 : The Yellow Labradors Club's 33rd Field Trial Meeting ; All-Aged Stake for 12 dogs (open to members only) at West Hyde, Nr. Hereford. Judges : Mrs. Eccles, Major Benson and Mr. Ronald MacDonald. Hon. Sec., Mrs. Arthur Wormald, Glenstuart, Cummertrees, Annan. (Tel. Cummertrees 236).

Sept. 27 : Northern Golden Retriever Association, Puppy and Non-Winners Stake.) (Winderlath, Penrith.) Judges : Capt. J. D. McPherson, Mr. G. Curle and Mr. G. Blacklock. Secretary : Mrs. M. M. Waters, Greenfoot House, Raughton Head, Dalston, Carlisle.

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